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MONSTERS IN LITERATURE

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Acta Iassyensia

Comparationis 29 (1/2022)

MONSTERS IN LITERATURE
LES MONSTRES DANS LA LITTÉRATURE
MONŞTRII ÎN LITERATURĂ

In his well-renowned collection of essays *Sulle spalle dei giganti* (2017) – *On the Shoulders of Giants* (2019, for the edition in English) – Umberto Eco interestingly points out that, unlike beauty, whose aesthetic judgment implies detachment, ugliness, on the other hand, sparks a passionate reaction of disgust or repulsion. Moreover, he emphasizes that language itself represents a means of conveying this kind of attitude as there are far more synonyms for *ugly* than for *beautiful*. Among them, the word *monstrous* stands out. It designates a concept that, irrespective of the cultural traditions it has been related to, carries an important feature: its duality − from antiquity to the present, humans have constantly felt and expressed both horror and fascination, lure and repugnance towards monsters, were they real or imaginary embodiments of terror, and the monstrous. Furthermore, the literal and the symbolic dimensions also speak for their dual nature. They transcend their mythical and folk origins to become a multiuse cultural category employed in domains as diverse as biology, psychology, religion, literature, cinematography, art, and even politics.

MONSTERS IN LITERATURE, the theme we proposed for the 29th issue of *AIC*, has particularly drawn the attention of specialists in humanities from various European, South American and African academic institutions, precisely due to its compelling cultural versatility. Putting the concepts of monster and monstrosity into dialogue with a variety of literary works standing for different traditions and epochs, the sixteen articles gathered in this volume bring upfront substantial analyses that contemplate literature in its connections to fields such as cultural / postcolonial / ethnic and racial or gender studies, as well as to mythology, philosophy, psychology, politics, or performing arts. The topics addressed are various: while some of the contributors are engaged in tracing back the theme to traditional Persian poetry or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, others share an interest in accommodating narratives of the Gothic genre to postmodern interpretive approaches. Thus, demons, vampires, sea creatures, disabled or inhuman beings, along with phobias, fears and abnormal desires, all are running through the texts of the present issue, proving yet again that monsters not only can take the shape of terrifying fictional characters or physically hideous persons, but also that of nightmarish forces constantly living within us.

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Dans son célèbre recueil d'essais *Sulle spalle dei giganti* (2017) – *Sur les épaules des géants* (2018, pour l'édition en langue française) – Umberto Eco souligne, de manière intéressante, qu'à la différence de la beauté, dont le jugement esthétique implique le détachement, la laideur suscite une réaction passionnée de dégoût ou de répulsion. De plus, il souligne que le langage lui-même représente un véhicule pour ce genre d'attitude car il y a beaucoup plus de synonymes de *laid* que de *beau*. Parmi eux, le mot *monstrueux* se démarque. Il désigne un concept qui, quelles que soient les traditions culturelles auxquelles il est rattaché, porte une caractéristique importante : sa dualité – de l'Antiquité à nos jours, l'homme n'a cessé d'éprouver et d'exprimer à la fois horreur et fascination, appât et répugnance envers les monstres (fussent-ils les incarnations réelles ou imaginaires de la terreur) et le monstrueux. De plus, les dimensions littérale et symbolique des monstres parlent également de leur double nature. Les monstres transcen-

dent leurs origines mythiques et folkloriques pour devenir une catégorie culturelle polyvalente, opérant dans des domaines aussi divers que la biologie, la psychologie, la religion, la littérature, les arts visuels et même la politique.

LES MONSTRES DANS LA LITTÉRATURE, le thème que nous avons proposé pour le 29e numéro de la revue *AIC*, a retenu l'attention des spécialistes des sciences humaines de diverses institutions académiques d'Europe, d'Amérique du Sud et d'Afrique, précisément en raison de sa polyvalence culturelle convaincante. Faisant dialoguer les concepts de monstre et de monstruosité avec une variété d'œuvres littéraires représentant des traditions et des époques différentes, les dix-six articles réunis dans ce volume proposent des analyses substantielles qui envisagent la littérature dans ses liens avec des domaines tels que les études culturelles, les études postcoloniales, les études ethniques et raciales et les études de genre, et aussi avec la mythologie, la philosophie, la psychologie, la politique et les arts de la scène. Les sujets abordés sont, à leur tour, variés : alors que certains des contributeurs s'attachent à faire remonter le thème donné à la poésie persane traditionnelle ou aux *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide, d'autres partagent un intérêt à accommoder les récits du genre gothique aux approches interprétatives postmodernes. Par conséquent, démons, vampires, créatures marines, êtres infirmes ou entités inhumaines, ainsi que phobies, peurs et désirs anormaux sont évoqués dans les articles qui composent ce nouveau numéro de la revue, prouvant une fois de plus que les monstres peuvent prendre non seulement la forme de personnages fictifs terrifiants ou des êtres physiquement hideux, mais aussi celle des forces cauchemardesques qui vivent constamment en nous.

*

În bine-cunoscuta sa colecție de eseuri *Sulle spalle dei giganti* (2017) – *Pe umerii giganților* (2018, pentru ediția în limba română) – Umberto Eco observă în mod interesant că, spre deosebire de frumusețe, a cărei judecată estetică presupune detașare, urâțenia provoacă o reacție pasională de dezgust sau repulsie. Mai mult, esteticianul subliniază că limbajul în sine reprezintă un mijloc de transmitere a acestui tip de atitudine, căci există mult mai multe sinonime pentru *urât* decât pentru *frumos*. Printre ele se remarcă termenul *monstruos*. Acesta desemnează un concept care, indiferent de tradițiile culturale cărora li se asociază, prezintă o trăsătură importantă: dualitatea sa – din Antichitate și până în zilele noastre, oamenii au simțit și au exprimat constant atât groază, cât și fascinație, atracție, cât și aversiune față de monștri (fie ei întruchipări reale ori imaginare ale terorii) și față de monstruos. În plus, dimensiunile literală și simbolică ale acestora sunt o mărturie a naturii lor duale. Ei reușesc să-și depășească originile mitice și populare pentru a deveni o categorie culturală multifuncțională, operantă în arii foarte diverse, precum biologia, psihologia, religia, literatura, artele vizuale și chiar politica.

MONȘTRII ÎN LITERATURĂ, tema propusă pentru numărul 29 al *AIC*, a atras în mod deosebit atenția specialiștilor în științe umaniste din diverse instituții academice europene, sud-americane și africane, tocmai datorită deosebitei sale versatilități culturale. Punând în dialog conceptele de monstru și monstruozitate cu o varietate de opere literare care reprezintă tradiții și epoci diferite, cele șaisprezece articole din volumul de față aduc în prim-plan analize consistente care surprind literatura în conexiunile sale cu domenii precum studiile culturale, studiile postcoloniale, cele etnico-rasiale sau de gen, precum și cu mitologia, filozofia, psihologia, politica sau artele spectacolului. Subiectele tratate sunt felurite: în vreme ce unii autori își manifestă interesul pentru explorarea temei din perspectiva poeziei tradiționale persane sau a *Metamorfozelor* lui Ovidiu, alții caută să concilieze literatura gotică și abordările interpretative postmoderne. Astfel, demoni, vampiri, creaturi marine, ființe diforme sau entități inumane, alături de fobii, frici și dorințe perverse populează articolele care compun prezentul număr al revistei, demonstrând o dată în plus că monștrii pot îmbrăca nu doar forma unor personaje ficționale terifiante sau a unor ființe cu aspect hidos, ci și pe aceea a forțelor coșmarești care sălășluiesc în adâncul nostru.

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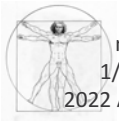

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Sea Monsters. Theoretical Perspectives

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Fictional works that are centered on elements pertaining to the maritime imaginary are established around individual figures as those of the sea monsters. They express terror and instinctive repulsion. By associating the sea monsters with the waves, one can argue that, for instance, the malignant representations of the mermaid – wave is the animation of the sea water, same as the waving of mermaid's hair represents an animation of her seductive power – evoke seafarers' phantasmas connected to the image of a fatal woman.

Saint Augustin defined the monster as a deviation from the norm. Therefore, monster can be seen as the Other, as the alterity of the human condition. In the medieval period, man was terrified by the immensity of the maritime spaces, and this feeling was reflected in stories about sea monsters, but the development of the maritime field made that terror be transformed in curiosity.

In the present essay we'll focus on the development of the theories related to sea monsters and we'll argue that these monsters are nothing but ways in which we perceive the world around us and demand us to reassess our cultural assumptions towards differences and force us to tolerate any forms of expression.

From the *Old Testament* Leviathan to the 19th century kraken, sea monsters mark maritime spaces with their terrifying presences. They often get dangerous, even evil; and on the other hand, under many aspects, they inspire fear and predict misfortunes. From ancient times, the sea inspired the greatest fears to human beings, causing a sense of reluctance among people.

In Antiquity, the sea was regarded as the edge of the known world, where the divine, the human and the animal mix one with each other, where myth and reality were inextricably blending together. So, the ancient man downgraded the ocean to the outskirts of his universe, and inside these maritime borders there could be found the ends of the earth. And so, where humans could not reach up with their sight, the imagination found a prosperous land to give birth to monsters, for they are literally the product of the environment that hosts them.

In the Middle Ages, for Christian Europe, the Atlantic Ocean constituted a terrifying bordering area. Isidore of Seville described it as "incommensurable and underestimated"[1] (Randles, 1989: 6), and in this sense, Pillars of Hercules, located in today's Gibraltar Strait, symbolized these limits. It can be noticed that in the Middle Ages, the Atlantic Ocean represented a border in people's imagination (Del Castillo, 1991: 15-25). And if it represented the borders of the known world, imagination would enrich it with different creatures, some of those being more frightening than others. Sometimes the oceanic space was seen as a vestige of the flood, as a relic of a catastrophe, a liquid space without landmarks, a picture of the infinite, disorder, chaos, and consequently a landmark for monsters (Corbin, 1988: 12). Other times, the sea was seen as a demonic space, being presented as the chaotic part of the world, favourable to the proliferation of monstrous creatures.

[1] "de l'incommensurable et de l'infrancissable" (our translation).

As it is well known, their presences are closely related to the unknown character of these geographical spaces. Monsters actually define a spatial reality that escapes human knowledge and materialize themselves thanks to human imagination. Miraculousness unfolds beyond the limits of the oceans, facing the void. If the waves of the ocean are often considered dangerous, they can paradoxically shelter a heavenly refuge, too. Thus, in the 6th century AD, abbot Brendan of Clonfert initiated a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in search of the Islands of Happiness and Fortune. The story of his voyage – *Navigatio Sanci Brendani Abbatis* – contributed to the spread of the mythical image of the Atlantic Ocean in the Middle Ages. So, the maritime space represents the birth place of limitless imagination. Escaping from the domination of man, this unknown space hosts both monstrous and diabolical creatures and paradisiac places. In fact, it can be argued that during the Middle Ages, man ambiguously glanced at the seas and oceans which were disputed by the forces of good and evil. It is equally considered as an empire of evil and misfortune, but also a source of happiness and riches (Villain-Gandossi, 2004: 75). In the light of this antagonism, we must place the perception of maritime space at the end of the 15th century, when the first transatlantic voyages took place, when the first sea monsters came to life, reflecting a mythical, biblical, but also eschatological perception of the ocean.

Sea monsters – embodiments of danger in the Middle Ages – represented truly these spaces due to the mixture between knowledge inherited from Antiquity as well as from their Christian interpretations. Consequently, all creatures that dwell at the ends of the world, as the Atlantic Ocean was considered to be, remind us of the mermaids from Antiquity, but described in a devilish vision. Isidore of Sevilla, in his *Etymologiae* (or *Originum sive etymologiarum libri viginti*) devotes forty-four articles to aquatic fauna. He refers to the whale as "this huge beast"[2] (Voisenet, 2000: 110-111), and he speaks even about sea dragons and mermaids (Cazenave, 2007: 162). Whether they are the image of sin or danger, their symbolism perfectly reflects the analogy between the sea and death.

When Christopher Columbus started his voyage over the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, his imaginary was invaded by more or less fantastic travel stories in which reality and magic homogeneously blended. The stories about mermaids couldn't be missing, because, as it is mentioned by C.-C. Kappler: "Who did not see monsters, did not navigate"[3] (Kappler, 1999: 115). Thus, on January 9, 1493, Columbus saw three mermaids near the coasts of Hispaniola Island, but he expressed his deception about them: "they were not so beautiful as they are described, for in a way, their faces resembled a man's face"[4] (Sánchez, 1996: 112). Columbus, however, a pretty pragmatic man, was not very interested in the subject, his writings focusing on much more technical issues of navigation. Of course, the maritime imaginary is imbued with fabulous stories, and of course, the perception of the maritime space is determined by the biblical tradition and the ancient myths. And yet, the space dedicated to sea monsters is not too vast. It is true that Christopher Columbus reported in his journal another episode in which he claimed to have fished a large sea pig, whose body was covered with fish scales. The animal was described as follows: "A fish (...) that seemed to be a pig covered with fish scales"[5] (Kappler, 1999: 196), becomes the representation of a frightening creature. Bernard Huevelmans and Gilbert Lascaut claim that language is decisive in the construction of sea

[2] "cette bête d'immense taille".

[3] "qui n'a pas vu de monstres n'a pas voyagé".

[4] "no eran tan hermosas como las pintan, que en alguna manera tenían forma de hombre la cara".

[5] "un pez [...] que parecía proprio puerco [...] que era toda concha tiesta ...".

monsters. The poverty of vocabulary and the unceasing need for analogies with the known world determines the authors of voyage logs to describe an unknown animal by dismembering it piece by piece to be able to compare it to a being already known, and this determines the reader to imagine a composite creature that hardly resembles with what the traveller would have seen. Therefore, the hybridity of the monster results in this case from the inappropriate use of the vocabulary.

Despite the progress of the real world, fiction manages to survive by mixing the reported deeds with authentic stories. Sea monsters portrayed without any doubt the dangers that were undergone by the seamen and they were marking by their presence the limits of that space, which had been unknown up to that moment. Sea monsters and their continuous occurrences have been functioning for a long time as a warning for the man who wanted to venture into the unknown. Their presence continues to signal the high degree of danger of the seas and oceans, indicating their almost bestial character, but also the importance of the wonderful result of the medieval imagination, which really refuses to vanish. Finally, their presence is part of a well-defined iconographic system of representations at that time. The reason for decorating of these empty spaces with monsters is not the simple ornamentation, but rather is the reflection of persistent fantasies or anxiety resulting from the mix of unknown with danger.

The fear of the unknown that is materialized in the occurrence of sea monsters is definitively a reflection of many inner fears at that time: the fear of loss of physical integrity or the fear of punishment for various behaviours. The seafarer of the 16th and 17th centuries was actually confronting those ancestral terrors strictly related to the representations of the world and therefore those of the seas and oceans. Because the sea conceals a demonic and diluvian character, seafarers who ventured at sea, exposed themselves to various dangers. Sea monsters, true incarnations of those fears, materialized these torments. These representations of social disorder and cosmic chaos actually offer a projection of the forces that threaten human being both from the outside and inside (Cazenave, 1979: 235). It is also important to notice that in the actual travel accounts based on maritime experiences, monsters originating in biblical or antique imaginary are not mentioned. However, other monsters, real monsters this time, are successfully making their appearance. These are creatures from the animal kingdom whose surprising nature places them in the category of monsters – sharks, whales or octopuses.

The observations of many religious missionaries and seafarers who have crossed the oceans, reveal their fear, but at the same time the morbid curiosity triggered by these marine animals. Thus, they were characterized as phantasmagorical and cruel, so these marine species are presented as emblematic creatures, acknowledged due to their savageness.

The cruel, even bestial, character of the sea, is perfectly reflected by the images of these aquatic creatures. The sea is equally defined as monstrous, as, for example, it swallowed its victims in the same way a monster swallowed its prey. And, in fact, men fear the great devouring sea, which is directly associated with death. Therefore, the liquid element is assimilated with a force capable of swallowing beings. The sea, with its cruelty, appears as a representation of a destructive will, and is also the image of a personified monster.

In conclusion, if the sea monsters appear on navigation charts or in travel accounts, it is mainly due to their meanings. They reveal the wonderful and unknown character of maritime spaces, materializing man's fears, which are closely related to it. But over the centuries, maritime experience has strengthened, and the oceanic crossings became a reality. In the 16th century, then in the 17th century, the expansion of the great European powers, the christening

of the New World and, lastly, good seamanship slowly changed human perception of maritime spaces.

If the sea still assumes a terrifying character, the Christian church undertakes an evangelization of maritime limits, giving them a sacred and much more soothing dimension (Cabantous, 2002: 172). Now, before the oceanic crossings, the ships are baptized and there are organized religious masses before each sea expedition. If in old days the spilled blood of a sacrificed ram on the ship's deck was meant to protect it during the voyage, the holly water is now used the same way for its magical functions (Le Pohon, 1981: 56).

The evangelization of the limits of maritime spaces and, later, naturalistic theology offers a vision of the deep which is lacking sea monsters (Cazenave, 1979: 250). Now the oceans are under the protection of the heavenly characters. The ocean seems, therefore, inhabited by their celestial figures, and the dominant Christianity offers all its comforting protection. Not only charted navigation routes are marked with saints and holy figures, opening and protecting those routes, but they are also encircling the monsters who are meant to disappear.

The wild world of the deep, its bestiality and its diabolical spirit are thus minimized under the influence of Christianity, which conquers and dominates the ocean spaces that otherwise were consecrated to the tenebrous monsters. Finally, if monsters tend to disappear, it is mainly due to scientific, technical and cartographic progress. Indeed, ocean explorations end up revealing their non-existence, and those marine monsters join the other mythical creatures in the pantheon of legends and myths. Thus, the magic and the unreal are gradually detached from the real, and knowledge based on nature observation dissociates monstrosity from other demonic features (Cazenave, 1979: 250). However, even if navigation further pushes the geographic limits of the known world, the presence of sea monsters is less and less brought into discussion. As it could be seen, they embody the dangers of the oceans, but all these problems do not disappear, and that is why the church invested in these hostile marine landscapes, marking these spaces with its presence meant to inspire peace and confidence for all who were at sea.

It should be clarified, however, that sea monsters continue to exist in the folklore of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Their presences, such as the occurrences of krakens or mermaids over time, demonstrate in fact to what extent the marine universe remains fundamentally hostile to man (Geistdoerfer, 2002: 53). Despite the technical and maritime progress, the sea world inspires even today the biggest human fears. Undoubtedly, monsters reflect this eschatological concern that is inseparable from the analogy established between death and sea. Indeed, they embody the anxiety caused by the fear of disappearance of the physical body in the oceans, problematizing another more important issue – the human nature.

Sea serpents have made their way in literature through a work written in the style of *The Arabian Nights – Pacha of Many Tales* (1835) by Frederick Marryat. In *The Fourth Voyage of Huckaback*, the storyteller is aboard a ship hit by a hurricane which is drifting in the Caribbean area under the influence of ocean currents. Its crew is attacked by a thirty-meter-long sea serpent, who swallows a crew member at a time. But the beast is finally driven away by using a broom soaked in tar.

But, perhaps the most famous and genuine sea monster dating from the times when Marryat wrote his novels, remains Mocha Dick, a huge white whale from the Cape Horn, which is supposed to have successfully escaped from a hundred attempts to be caught or killed. Jeremiah Reynolds reported the defeat of Mocha Dick in *Knickerbocker Magazine* in May 1839, and this story inspired Herman Melville to write *Moby-Dick* in 1851. Thus, the whale becomes

the emblem of a symbolical adventure for life and death, a picture often evoked by the vastness of the maritime space.

Victor Hugo brilliantly describes the meeting with a kraken called a devilfish in *Toilers of the Sea* (*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, 1866), which appears near the islands in the English Channel. But the work that has encouraged the interest in the monsters of the deep was *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, 1869-1870) by Jules Verne. He uses the fear of sea monsters at the beginning of the novel, when Captain Nemo's submarine, Nautilus, attacks other ships like a creature of the deep. He says: "The human mind enjoys grandiose conceptions of supernatural beings. Now the sea is their best vehicle, for it is the only environment which can produce and develop such giants: beside them the land animals, the elephants or rhinoceroses, are mere dwarfs" (Verne, 1998: 14). When the explorers approached what is proven to be the ruins of Atlantis, the narrator remarks "the eyes of huge crustaceans lurking in their dens, of gigantic lobsters standing to attention like halberdiers and waving their legs with metallic clanks, of titanic crabs set like cannon on their mounts, and of awe-inspiring squid twisting their tentacles into a living brush of snakes" (Verne, 1998: 259).

Verne's novel is full of such miracles, and, though, none of his creatures is supernatural, they are just as scary as any legendary monster, and both the giant squid, and the sea serpent, which he mentions, have become real features representative for his work. Authors had to be very creative to give life to stories with sea monsters. In *The Water-Devil* (1874), Frank R. Stockton reveals that the underwater monster that seemed to attack ships in a particular location was actually a magnetic sea mountain. In *The Rival Beauties* (1895), W.W. Jacobs describes a sea serpent that gets scared by the fog signals issued by a ship's horn system. Subsequently, Ray Bradbury transformed this idea into *The Fog Horn* (1951), where a large sea serpent is attracted by the sounds emitted by a lighthouse. In *The Sea Raiders* (1896), H.G. Wells described an episode where some tourists on the South Devon coast are suddenly threatened by a sudden attack initiated by a group of huge octopuses*, Haplotenthis Ferox*, as he calls them, which disappear as mysteriously as they appeared.

Sea serpents and krakens will continue to show up in fiction for many years, so John Wyndham uses their images for an alien being in the ocean waters in *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), his novel being representative for a new wave of monsters coming out of post-atomic waters, the most important being Gojira or Godzilla. This and other imitations from 1950-1960, presented mostly post-atomic mutations, and though they are clear evidences that the ocean is the habitat for many huge monsters, they are not the same as the mythical monsters. Two authors can be considered responsible for recovering the figure of the sea monster in two distinctive ways in the early 20th century and, by doing so, they refreshed and revived this concept for the generations to come. Those two authors were William Hope Hodgson and H.P. Lovecraft. Hodgson spent seven years on board commercial vessels (1891-1898), traveling several times around the world. His experiences served as a basis for numerous novellas and two of his novels. His writings are the real proof of a rich imagination that bypassed the traditional superstitions about sea monsters. Undoubtedly, the hours he had spent in the night during his bridge watches offered him the necessary time to speculate in relation to marine fauna. His first horror story – *Tropical Horror* (1905), although it does not have a very well-defined aesthetic form, can be seen as such nocturnal meditation. A ship is threatened by a giant sea serpent from whose mouth many tentacles came out. Obviously, it is not an ordinary sea serpent. It also has a huge claw, same as a lobster, by which it crushes whatever comes out in its way. In *The Voice in The Night* (1907), the crew of a ship that is heading towards an area

patched in fog, hears about the story of two shipwrecked passengers on an island infested with some species of mushrooms, and find out they have been contacted that same disease. In *The Stone Ship* (1914), an underwater volcanic eruption brings out an ancient ship that has been petrified, but it is also the shelter for several creatures of the deep, including huge sea cucumbers and giant eels.

More recent stories centred on sea monsters are rewritings of other texts, with just a few original touches. *The Rig* (1966) by Chris Boyce presents a gigantic sea plant that grows and invades an oil rig. In *The Shark God* (1940), A.E. Van Vogt describes a shark god who takes human form to intervene in the local shark massacre, but it discovers that its human form has its limitations. Sharks, particularly, the big white, were the cause of this big return, which is underlined by the success of *Jaws* (1974) by Peter Benchley. There is nothing supernatural in his novel, but the action and suspense offer the same thrills that any other mythical sea monster would have provided.

The Loch (2005) by Steven Alten forms a connection between the Sargasso Sea, where the main character faces a huge squid, and Loch Ness, where he has to confront with an old enemy from his childhood. The monster of Loch Ness is one of the most famous aquatic monsters, but most often it appears in children's stories such as *The Water Horse* (1990) by Dick King-Smith and *The Boggart and The Monster* (1997) by Susan Cooper.

The status of the monster in the postmodern literature and theory changes, as the monster as it is perceived in a traditional sense (i.e. as an Other feared by humans) is largely absent in postmodern literature. This is mostly happening due to the fact that the defining features of monstrosity – hybridity, excess and evasion of representation, otherwise perceived grotesque and scary – are celebrated in postmodernism as dissonant elements that may accordingly lead to "genuine heterogeneity" (Benjamin, 1991: 210), in the context of postmodernism, the idea of excess in representation defines the standard or the norm. Through postmodern theories, the concept of alterity and the Other are radically outsourced as an *absolute Other*. Representation is possible, but only as re-presentation, in other words, work itself is always framed by a series of referents that always lose their value and block any sense of pure perception. This approach is supported by Lyotard and Baudrillard's ideas who stressed the issue of real and image that define postmodern literary discourses. As such, monsters from postmodernist fiction are not the subject of fear or of any manifestations of sufferings at the psychological level, and they are the emblem of rejection of the great narratives and are related to the considerations of self-consciousness of self-presentation.

Highlighting the absence of those types of monsters that are causing fear in postmodern fictions does not equate their lack of relevance to postmodern theories. The concept of monster is widely discussed in poststructuralist theoretical discourse, in full compliance with the conditions of postmodern culture. Derrida proposes that, in the preparations for the future, we must encounter the monster and includes the idea of monstrosity in the ethics of hospitality (Derrida, 2000: 89). Foucault suggests that monsters are an inherent part of the "order of things" (2005: 169-171); that they aren't hybrids or other kind of figures, but examples of "metamorphoses of the prototype" (169), which are natural and essential for the evolutionary transition to adjacent forms (171).

In the latest evolutionary theories, the idea of evolutionary continuum is completed, at certain points, by the emergence of certain types of monsters – organic beings that do not match the natural order. This is postulated in Gould's writings as well as in Foucault's texts. According to the latter, "the proliferation of monsters without a future is necessary to enable

us to work down again from the continuum" (2005: 170). He admits that "as we move in one direction, as a drama of the earth and waters must be construed, in the other direction, as an obvious observation of forms" (Foucault, 2005: 170) and so "the monster ensures the emergence of difference" (171).

Donna Haraway's postmodern feminism is born of a similar position regarding alterity and monstrosity. Writing in a postmodern world that is comparable to the "the womb of a pregnant monster" (Haraway, 1992: 295), she claims that the Other is constantly determined, classified and frequently removed from society and culture. Those who are not apprehensible because of differences are considered obstacles to progress and as such are inadequate to support this progress. Same as Foucault, Haraway promotes an approach that has the ability to turn culture into the process of acceptance of alterity as a vehicle for change and adaptation. In her essay – *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* – she notes that scientific research defines culture and identity. The identified monster insists on fixed categories and the ethics of practice, as well as the construction of "structured inequality" (Haraway, 1992: 232).

Based on such ideas, postmodernism, in literature and theory, promotes a world without categorizations and validations, insisting on border crossing points between categories and excess identity. Postmodern monsters are thus, at least to a certain extent, those "hopeful monsters" that Tony E. Jackson was mentioning in his work – *Charles and the Hopeful Monster: Postmodern Evolutionary Theory in "The French Lieutenant's Woman"*.

Monsters from postmodernist fiction reflect postmodern theoretical outlook on monsters and their relationships with the norm. Occasionally, in postmodern literature, it can be seen that monsters behave themselves as postmodern expressions of carnivalesque and grotesque, offering elements for socio-literary comments and criticism, as an excess against which the structures of society are founded. Often, these monsters deviate from the conventional notions of alterity and they don't present themselves as fictional characters. They draw attention to their own textual status in the literary works. Such monsters are part of a literary effort that is conscious of the theoretical aspects and the self, and is meant to comment on the representation of alterity and difference and the potential to transgress the predictable limits of the narrative.

Directly connected to postmodern auto reflexiveness, the presence of the monster is obviously part of the narrative crisis. The case of the author in the context of postmodernity consists in the fact that there is an obligation with regards to the repletion of previous forms. The presence of the monster is therefore a challenge for the idea that its representations are only possible at the level of the repetitions of older monsters. So, the presence of the monster can be considered as a self-conscious criticism of the representation of the monstrosity in a direct relationship with the postmodern crisis of reality, identity and representation.

The sea continues to be perceived as a chaotic and uncontrollable space in which there is no sense of order. It represents an equally chaotic and disordered past, as well as the uncontrollable functioning of memory. Such a construction of the maritime space is obvious in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), where the dangers inherent to the oceans are represented by a sea monster.

The evolution of the novel prefigures itself from Charles's initial meditations about the sea, as he was wondering about it and showing his ownership over it. His past will also prove to be firm and strong as the sea, showing him that past can still cause harm to someone, which is reflected in the character's fight to get out of the water. There is a strong impact of a series

of events offered by the "horrible experience" (Murdoch, 1978: 24) that interrupts Charles's story. He reveals that an extremely unusual presence has caused him suffering: "I was sitting, with the notebook beside me (...). I had been looking intently into a rock pool and watching a remarkably long, reddish faintly bristly sea-worm (…) *I saw a monster rising from the waves*" (23).

A snake-like monster that will appear later at a crucial moment of the narrative, was interpreted by critics in different ways: as a representation of Charles's fear of female sexuality (Dipple, 1982: 278; Tucker, 1986: 382), his subconscious, his possessiveness and uncontrolled jealousy (Conradi, 1986: 245), as well as his failure to "signify the traumatic kernel at the heart of the real" (Nicol, 2004: 138).

Despite the accuracy of these interpretations, a further understanding is possible: the sea monster represents the unpleasant events of Charles's past which he wishes to control and suppress from his autobiography, but which will eventually overwhelm him. His attempts to find a logical explanation for this presence – he attributes it to an LSD consumption or to an optical illusion – reflects his desire to find explanations for his past and to eliminate the unpleasant events from it. These attempts also highlight his failure as an author of an autobiography. But the sea, same as the past, has spots where it is deep and it hides monsters which he will later need to confront.

Charles's falling into the sea can be interpreted as a strong advice that he should eventually face his past mistakes, instead of passing them into a glossary of his memory, and it is not surprising that what he discovers in the cauldron is precisely the monster from his past: "The monstrous sea serpent had actually been in the cauldron with me" (Murdoch, 1978: 350). The sea serpent embodies Arrowby's continuous frustration to wipe off his sins from his autobiography. But this past is equally unstable as the sea is, and his cleansing attempts of the past prove ineffective, for the past he wants to control draws him in the depths of memory, where the monsters are watching him.

As a whole, the anthropological approach is highlighted as a solid test to understand the cultural significance of monster's alterity: the difference which, at certain times, separates the monster from man and which charges it with negativity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that monsters can allow us to find out about the cultures in which they were generated (Cohen, 1996: 3). He argues that "monsters are the embodiment of a cultural moment" (4). To some extent this can be true. Undoubtedly, monsters affect a certain culture in the responses it generates and also with regards to the way how they are built in the pre-existing systems of the respective culture.

However, not the monster itself, but the systematic characterization of the monster in a particular culture, reflects the fears and social anxieties and reveals a cultural moment. The monster itself runs away from our natural control, but a part of it is left behind to mirror the elementary fears and anxieties that appeared at the time of meeting monstrosity.

Following the idea that monsters are culturally and historically specific, J.J. Cohen also claims that, in spite of it "the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear somewhere else" (Cohen, 1996: 4). Through this statement, he claims the evasive nature of the monster, for it exceeds both the tangible form and its representation.

This cultural and historical specificity is significantly highlighted in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, where Foe mentions the wreck of the ship carrying slaves in the same context with the image of a kraken:

> Those great beds of seaweed are the home of a beast called by mariners the *kraken* […] which has arms as thick as a man's thigh and many yards long, and a beak like an eagle's. I picture the kraken lying on the floor of the sea, staring up through tangled fronds of weeds at the sky, its many arms furled about it, waiting. It is into the terrible orbit that Friday steers his fragile craft. (2010: 140)

Through this image, slavery could be understood, on the one hand, as a terrible thing, a monstrosity that is hiding deep under the surface of the water: "If the kraken lurks anywhere, it lurks here, watching out of its stony hooded undersea eyes" (Coetzee, 2010: 156). And since this kraken is a dangerous monster, which must be left untouched, the image could be understood, on the other hand, as Foe's fear to face the terrible truth of colonial history, which could be put in direct connection with Susan's fear of "monsters of the deep" (11). Foe and Susan feel compelled to save Friday's past from the depths, considering it is their duty to jump into the sea and immerse into the past:

> Friday rows his log of wood across the dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea. He rows across it and is safe. To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye. Otherwise, like him, we sail across the surface and come ashore none the wiser, and resume our old lives, and sleep without dreaming, like babes. (141)

However, neither Susan nor Foe are willing to plunge into the sea. Thus, Susan wonders:

> But who will do it? […] It is easy enough to lie in bed and say what must be done, but who will dive into the wreck? On the island I told Cruso it should be Friday, with a rope about his middle for safety. But if Friday cannot tell us what to see, is Friday in my story any more than a figuring (or pre-figuring) of another diver? (142)

The kraken is part of the European mythological heritage and, therefore, it belongs to the Western literary tradition, same as Susan Barton and Foe in Coetzee's novel. They translate Friday in accordance with Eurocentric thinking systems that are not familiar with his Afrocentric understanding. But alterity is well received, despite the fact that it proves itself unable to give it a symbolic sense. The dark alterity remains dark (the kraken, the place where the boat was shipwrecked, Friday), but the phobic undesirability transmitted by these signifiers has transformed itself into familiarity, their binary antagonism being reconciled.

Monsters represent illusions of the human mind. They can be pushed towards the farthest geographical limits and the boundaries of discourse, they can be hidden at the edge of the world and in the depths of our mind, but they always come back. And every time they do it, not only they bring a complete knowledge of our place in history, but they also carry a self-knowledge and a discourse that was born throughout alterity. These monsters are nothing but ways in which we perceive the world around us and demand us to reassess our cultural assumptions towards differences and force us to tolerate any forms of expression.

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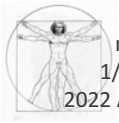

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Bitches and Witches: Grotesque Sexuality in Ovid's Scylla (*Metamorphoses* 13.730-14.74)

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As paradigmatic emblems of fantasy and imagination, creative freedom and poetic license, hybrid monsters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* preside over the author's playful engagement with traditional aesthetic, moral, and societal values, and gendered ideals. This article aims at a subversive reading of one monstrous creature in the final pentad of Ovid's epic: Scylla (*Met.* 13.730-14.74). As a monster, Scylla incorporates several misogynistic stereotypes ("doggishness", *puella dura*, self-laceration, *vagina dentata*), but she eventually escapes the objectifying male gaze and finds rest in a stable, permanent shape that is no longer the feminine-gendered battlefield for male heroism. Breaking away from the conventional epic plot structure "male hero wins over feminized beasts and/or beautiful girls", Ovid considers the Roman national hero Aeneas with but a minimum of attention, while nymphs and women take center stage: Scylla's transformation from a girl into a monster and, finally, into a geological rock formation, is intertwined with tales about female solidarity and intimacy and about women's sexual desire, rage, and revenge. While Scylla's canine bloodlust and Circe's vengeful magic certainly reproduce typically patriarchal anxieties projected onto women, they are also traces of unruly, recalcitrant femininity within the canonical, male-dominated world of heroic epic.

Keywords

Ovid; Scylla; fictionality; subversion; sexuality; monster; male gaze.

Fact or Fiction: Ovid's Feminized Monsters and the Roman Canon

As the *Metamorphoses* approach the onset of Roman history, Ovid, the *enfant terrible* of Augustan literature, enjoys privileging a monster, Scylla, over a legendary hero who happens to be considered very important in Rome: Aeneas. In his "little *Aeneid*", as the passage in focus is commonly referred to, Ovid refuses to reprise what his grand predecessors have already told, but he demonstrates his predilection for poetic novelty. Aeneas is remarkably absent for over 300 lines although his voyage from Troy to Italy (*Aen.* 3-6) provides the framework for Ovid's series of metamorphic entanglements, "grotesque love affairs and pathetic heroines" (Lowe 2011: 263).[2] The marvellous, amorous, and monstrous elements that do exist in Virgil, yet in a "fragmented, scattered, unresolved" form, become Ovid's raw material:

[1] Musgrove suggests that Ovid, by leaving Aeneas aside, emphasizes the detachment from the world that also characterizes the Virgilian hero (1998b: 102).

[2] Ellsworth (1986: 27) cites several judgments from the 1960s and 1970s that criticize Ovid's insertion of frivolous elements into the sublime *Aeneid*-plot, and shows subsequently that Ovid's allusions and creative reinterpretations, far from being indecent, represent a clever reworking of the standard motifs of the post-Trojan war period.

"Rather than construct himself as an epigonal reader of the *Aeneid*, Ovid is constructing Virgil as a hesitant precursor of the *Metamorphoses*. There is a *Metamorphoses* latent in the *Aeneid*, Ovid's treatment tells us: in Circe and in the biform Scylla…" (Hinds 1998: 106). Ovid exchanges well-known episodes for variants taken from other authors, traditions, and genres (Myers 1994: 99-102; Fantham 2004: 128-130). The hybrid monster Scylla is embedded in an extensive etiological digression with multiple internal narrators, self-referential vignettes, and etiological explanations. The episode's structure has been compared to a set of nested "Chinese" boxes (Tissol 1997: 113; Hopman 2012: 241) and to the "brackets of an algebraic formula" (Griffin 1983: 191): a geographical remark about the Trojan fleet passing Sicily with its notorious local hazards, the narrow strait between Scylla and Charybdis (13.728-731), introduces Scylla's story which in turn contains two inset tales and various reported speeches.

A skeptical insertion à la "if that's not a lie" (13.733-734: *si non omnia uates / ficta reliquerunt*) pays tribute to poetic authorities on the subject matter while simultaneously questioning their reliability in a playful manner. Ovid "concedes that some or even a great deal of poetry is unquestionably *ficta*, while leaving open the possibility that at least some may not be" (Nagle 1988: 90). Yet this feigned "pretense of skepticism" (Galinsky 1975: 176) is not just a typically Ovidian sacrilegious introduction of "inappropriate wit into our memory of Vergil" (Tissol 1997: 112), but a reference to Scylla's topical status as an emblem of fictionality and creative imagination in Augustan poetry. "[B]y the time of the *Metamorphoses* she had become a touchstone for poetic fictiveness" (Hardie 2009: 63). Ovid himself contributed decisively to the consolidation of this semantic process: in his elegiac complaints about the "naïve *credulitas* of his readers who believe in the literal truth of what he has written about his *puella*" (2009: 61), Scylla is the first example of fantastic creations which only poets can create (*Amores* 3.12.21-22). By presenting various hybrid monsters "comme fabriqués par les poètes" (Jouteur 2009: 47), the elegy is both a satire on gullibility and a case for poetic license (*Am.* 3.12.41: *fecunda licentia uatum*). In *Trist.* 4.7.11-20, Ovid uses the unbelievability of monsters in a rhetorical adynaton that "denotes the impossibility of an action or fact by comparing it to a natural absurdity" (Hopman 2012: 225): he would sooner believe in Medusa, Scylla (4.7.14), or other composite creatures than that his addressee had abandoned him. Hence, the hybrids "exemplify the very idea of fiction" (2012: 226). In the *Metamorphoses*, the issue of believability (*credulitas*), is also staged within the metamorphic world itself: several text-internal characters reflect upon the probability of supernatural events (Hardie 2009: 62-63).

The monster Scylla had become "maidenized" (Lowe 2015: 70-72) in Hellenistic and Augustan poetry: the archaic Scylla was scarcely feminine, but either an abstract menace or a sea-monster with six heads, dogs' *protomai*, and a fish- or snake-tail.[3] Homer does not give any explanations for Scylla's hostility towards men (Tissol 1997: 209). Rationalizing interpretations equate Scylla to a dangerous cliff that poetic imagination took for a petrified monster (Lowe 2015: 78-80). Etymologically, Scylla is connected to σκύλαξ, the Greek word for puppy, and to the verbs σκυλεύω/σκυλάω and σκύλλω, all signifying acts of rapacious spoliation (Michalopoulos 2001: 157-158). Scylla comprises symbolically the concepts sea, dog, and femininity – three seemingly calm, docile, and amicable forces which can unpredictably turn into doom and peril for men (Hopman 2012: 8-14).[4] Successively understood as an

[3] On iconographical representations of Scylla see Hopman 2012: 56-65 and 96-107 and Aguirre Castro 2002.
[4] Lowe points out that marine and canine femininity were standardized metaphors for "feminine duplicity" already by the 6th century BC: Semonides, in his misogynist iamb on unpleasant stereotypes of women, mentions both the dog-woman and the sea-woman as undesirable, aggressive females (2015: 76).

embodiment of misogynist cultural fantasies, Scylla has been associated with an immoderately voracious, oversexualized, untamed *femme fatale*. Heraclitus refers to Scylla as "polymorphous shamelessness" (*Alleg. Hom.* 70.11) and stresses her "rapacity, recklessness, and greediness" (Hopman 2012: 186). Roman authors are first to attach the dogs' body parts explicitly to her pelvic and inguinal area while preserving her erotically alluring face and torso. With a multi-jawed canine crotch, she becomes a personified *vagina dentata*, the cross-cultural and cross-epochal concept of a female genital equipped with sharp teeth that represents male anxieties about castration and deprivation of patriarchal power through female sexuality (2012: 131-141; Lowe 2015: 74-75; Miller 2012: 316-319 and 326-328).

Reflections in the Beauty Salon

Yet Ovid portrays Scylla in a sympathetic way that might have been inspired by the iambic poet Aeschrion of Samos and the poetess Hedyle of Attica who composed an elegiac poem *Scylla* in the 3rd century BC of which only one fragment remains (Lowe 2011: 261-263). Both these Greek sources for Scylla the nymph reflect the "Hellenistic taste for humanizing and sentimentalizing fearsome monsters" (2011: 263) that Ovid must have been fond of. While the heroic combat motif is central to Homer's and Virgil's accounts, Ovid departs from the epic pattern "in favor of a maiden story" (Hopman 2012: 234). He is the first to make Scylla a vulnerable "damsel in distress" (Lowe 2015: 81) by combining extreme emotional states and feminine beauty. Her actions become understandable and evoke "a glimmer of fellow-feeling with [one] of the worst monsters of traditional mythology" (Tissol 1997: 209; cf. Jouteur 2009: 51). Before she acquired her monstrous form – her "uncanny waist girt with ravening dogs" (*Met.* 13.732), she was a coy and beautiful girl (733-734) at home in a world of female experience, care, and solidarity: annoyed by unwanted suitors (735), Scylla seeks refuge with her friends, the sea-nymphs; while combing each other's hair, the girls talk about their experiences with men (737). The thematic shift from Aeneas' heroic adventures to the gossiping girlfriends seems incoherent only *prima facie*: in fact, Ovid seizes the opportunity to elaborate on his favorite theme from the *Aeneid* – the disruptive forces of unrequited love and rejected advances, the core concern of Virgil's Dido-books (*Aen.* 1 and 4). Carving out what has been labelled a "thematic affinity" (Galinsky 1975: 221), Ovid uses the episode "to anticipate and reflect the situation of Aeneas" (Ellsworth 1986: 31). In addition, the ensuing "trio of love-triangles"[5] conjures not only the Virgilian triangle between Aeneas-Lavinia-Turnus (Nagle 1988: 93), but also two iconic episodes from Homer's *Odyssey* – the intertextual model of Virgil's *Aen.* 1-6 (Nagle 1988: 83).[6] Relics of a Homeric past, the one-eyed giant Polyphemus (*Od.* 9) and the sorceress Circe (*Od.* 10) haunt Ovid's "*Aeneid*" as they interfere in the Ovidian nymphs' (love) lives and provide a contextual background for Scylla's monstrous identity.

[5] Such is the title of B. R. Nagle's article on the intertwining love stories in *Met*. 13 and 14 (Galatea-Acis-Polyphemus; Glaucus-Scylla-Circe; and Circe-Picus-Canens). Underlying these intradiegetic triangles, Nagle sees a metaliterary triangle pattern: Ovid's trio of erotic triangles in *Met*. 13 and 14 substitutes for *Od*. and *Aen*. In the competition for readers' attention and approbation, Ovid thus positions his epic besides the already canonized giants (1988: 95). The placement of the three love-triangles at the point of arrival in Italy and the narrative shift from Greek to Roman materials is therefore very appropriately chosen: as the latest epicist who treats Polyphemus, Circe, and Scylla, Ovid makes a self-conscious statement about the emulatory nature of Roman poetry confronting the Greek tradition (96).

[6] J. D. Ellsworth (1986; 1988) notes that Ovid also takes up elements directly from Homer's *Odyssey*, not only from Virgil's adaptation in his Odyssean books (*Aen*. 1-6), and that "Ovid's *Odyssey*" would be an equally suitable label for *Met*. 13.623-14.608.

During an "intimate scene of a women's toilette" (Tissol 1997: 113), Galatea, distressed and close to tears, envies Scylla for her human suitors (*Met.* 13.740-745) because she has been vexed by a monstrous lover, the hideous Cyclops Polyphemus who jealously killed her boyfriend Acis (750-896). The inset tale is "the story of an unsightly giant, terrifying and ugly but not nearly as abject as Ovid's female monsters" (Pietropaolo 2018: 194). Whereas Galatea's personal involvement renders her a biased party rather than a neutral narrator (Farrell 1992: 266), she demonstrates advanced narrative skills (Pietropaolo 2018: 198) in her creative adaptation of the "comic tradition of Cyclopean representation" that often ridicules a giant's disharmonious affection for a slender nymph (Tissol 1990: 49). The gap between nymph and Cyclops already being large, the background story about Acis' death pushes the inherent drop in height from bathos to pathos, from romance to violence, to extreme levels (Griffin 1983: 193-195). Grotesque aesthetics, with their predilection for monstrosity, giantism, "the violation of natural boundaries and the disruption of the logic of proportions" (Pietropaolo 2018: 194) are at work in Galatea's tale: she visualizes Polyphemus in the least empathetic way and relentlessly mocks his clumsy wooing attempts until his emotional suffering becomes a "spectacle" for her internal and Ovid's external audience (Griffin 1983: 195-196). Although rejecting him with derision, the nymph "lingers on his effort to cross the boundary that separates them, simultaneously admitting him into her world and turning him away from it" (Pietropaolo 2018: 195). In her narration, several poetic traditions communicate with each other in a polyphonic "dialogue of genres", namely epic, elegy, and bucolic-pastoral poetry (Farrell 1992: 240-241). Polyphemus' Homeric characteristics (*Od.* 9) – enormous size, physical strength, menacing appearance, disrespect for the gods, and inclination towards violence – merge with those of Hellenistic accounts about enamored cyclopes (Theocr. *Id.* 6 and 11; Virg. *Ecl.* 2 and *Geo.* 1.404-409). Elegiac lovesickness smites the epic giant in a bucolic setting. The genres, topoi, and allusions, however, "do not retain their discrete, univocal identity, but work in dialogue to produce a generically innovative rendition of the story" (Farrell 1992: 245). Although placed in a new, amatory context, we recognize the Homeric giant through numerous references which "retell a considerable part of the meeting of Odysseus with the Cyclops" (Ellsworth 1986: 28). In love, Polyphemus seems to forget his Homeric role: he neglects his herds (*Met.* 13.736; 781) and is surprisingly indifferent towards sailors passing by (769). Moreover, he suddenly cares for his appearance as if he had read Ovid's eroto-didactic beauty recommendations. By expatiating on his unsuccessful attempts of *cultus,* consisting of combing his hair with a rake and shaving his beard with a scythe (764-767) while herself participating in a hair-styling session, Galatea brutally mocks his inhuman appearance: she derides him "for performing human actions that are discordant with his enormity and shagginess, and incongruous with the pieces of farming equipment that he uses as personal grooming tools" (Pietropaolo 2018: 199). Addressing him directly (*tibi*), she conjures his presence in a rhetorically elaborate *phantasia* that calls her audience's attention to the "aestheticism of visualization" (198). Nonetheless, Polyphemus is familiar with courteous rhetoric: the love-song he performs outside Galatea's cave resembles a *paraklausithyron* (201; Farrell 1992: 247), praising his beloved's beauty and mourning her rejection. It also displays characteristics of pastoral poetry. Only the hundred reeds of his panpipe (*Met.* 13.784) remind us that he is still an epic rhapsode, or at least, a rhapsode within a hexametric epic: for bucolic *Kleinformen*, seven or nine reeds would suffice, whereas his "Wurlitzer-scale" syrinx (Nagle 1988: 80) is closer to the "hundred mouths typically required for high epic" (Barchiesi 2007: 416).[7] Referring to

[7] Creese (2009) analyzes potential sexual double-entendres of Polyphemus' enormous panpipe and

Kenney's labelling of the episode as "hyper-pastoral", Farrell notes that "most of the pastoral motifs that Ovid employs here undergo a process of *auxesis*" (1992: 246). Polyphemus' rhetoric of hyperbole and fixation on size and quantity, abundance and excess, reveal an aspiration to surpass and intensify generic conventions and previous poetic appearances (251-252), while reflecting the pastoral convention of competitive *amoebaea* before a jury (Barchiesi 2007: 421). His long list of compliments for Galatea and poetic comparisons of her beauty (e. g. *splendidior uitro, tenero lasciuior haedo*[8], "more sparkling than crystal, more frolicsome than a tender kid") outnumbers those of Theocritus and Virgil by far and goes beyond good taste. Polyphemus even intensifies Galatea's name: she is not simply "milk-white", as her name suggests, but "whiter than the snow-white privet leaves" (*Met*. 13.789: *candidior folio niuei* […] *ligustri*). That the nymph listens to his song while lying in her boyfriend's arms in a cave adds a cruel note to Galatea's self-portrait. The melancholy that prevailed in Theocritus' pastoral love-song is, suitably, exchanged for grotesque amplifications and extreme violence (Jouteur 2001: 309). Theocritus' Cyclops concluded his song with the philosophical insight that poetry is the φάρμακον (*Id.* 11.1) for unrequited love. His Ovidian version, by contrast, is far from accepting Galatea's rejection: he hurls a part of a mountain at Acis when he finds the couple *in flagrante*. With such an epic killing mode par excellence that recalls his Odyssean behavior towards the Greeks, "his reformed character disintegrates" (Griffin 1983: 195) as if his attempts to become elegiac had failed (Lowe 2015: 220).[9] There are hints, however, that he never really knew the rules of elegiac courtship: he prides himself in being an acceptable *uir* (*Met*. 13.850) and a *dives amator* who has more sheep than he can count (13.824) while an elegiac lover is per definition not the husband (*uir*) and notoriously *pauper* (Barchiesi 2007: 419; Pietropaolo 2018: 206). His shagginess and size, although attractive to his own judgment (13.839-845) contradict the girl's beauty ideals: Galatea's lover is young, beardless, and slim. At the moment he dies, he is changed into a river god[10], an epitome of fluidity and changeability that contrasts with Polyphemus' solidity and mass (Barkan 1986: 80). Polyphemus' hirsuteness (*Met*. 13.766; 844-850) conveys a meta-literary comment on the genres and traditions at work in Galatea's narration, being a metaphor for the "old-fashioned, primitive, unrefined" style which Ovid usually opposes in his poetic program of *urbanitas* (Barchiesi 2007: 417; cf. Pietropaolo 2018: 200). Galatea repeatedly thematizes the contrast between beauty and repulsiveness that is at the heart of aesthetic discussions on the integration of ugliness into arts: when the Cyclops sees his reflection in the water (*Met*. 13.840-841), his boastful self-descriptions operate via superlatives and in part hubristic exaggerations. He concedes that his single eye might be considered a blemish but compares it to a giant artistic shield (851-852) or the sun itself (852-853), while his enormous height, although feared by most, renders him more attractive than Jupiter (842-844). The beauty he sees in himself is that of grotesque art: "Ugliness mediated by a well-crafted image does not generate a sense of repulsion but a sense of gratification […]. His mistake is that he considers that mirrored reflection as if it were an artistic image inviting him to the appreciation of and reflection on what it represents" (Pietropaolo 2018: 204-205). Visualizing

connects its hundred reeds to the hundred eyes of Argus, put to sleep by Mercury's song in *Met*. 1.

[8] I am grateful to Stephen Hinds who pointed out to me *per litteras* that this line corresponds to Horace's Ode to the Spring of Bandusium (3.13.1: *O fons Bandusiae splendidior uitro*).

[9] When Polyphemus reappears in *Met*. 14, he is again the rock-hurling giant raging against the Greeks that we know from *Od*. 9 and *Aen*. 3 (Lowe 2015: 219-220; Jouteur (2001: 263-271).

[10] Ovid does not disclose whether Galatea and Acis continue their relationship after his transformation. They could be an even more ideal match now that he is a river god – she is a sea-nymph – but Galatea seems upset. On Ovid's ambiguity on this matter, cf. Kenney 2008: 453.

Polyphemus' self-admiration, Galatea fashions him as a successor of Narcissus who falls prey to an erroneous assessment of real and imaginary.[11] But unlike Narcissus, the Cyclops does know that he sees himself (*Met.* 13.840: *certe ego me noui*); rather, his misjudgment is rooted in a philosophical discourse on the relativity of beauty and aestheticism. But the nymphs are subject to misjudgments too: "The reader's experience of the scene is dominated by dramatic irony, for, unlike Scylla herself, who has no premonition of her future transformation, and Galatea, who does not know that her gentle companion will soon cross the boundary of her natural form to enter that of a grotesque being, Ovid's readers are familiar with the myth" (Pietropaolo 2018: 196).

If Galatea and Polyphemus are at two ends of the scale, Galatea's listener Scylla is to become a "piquant blend of the abhorrent and the alluring" (Lowe 2015: 81). The "oxymoronic" (Hopman 2012: 227) juxtaposition of maidenly beauty and monstrous repulsiveness split up between the two characters converges in one body once Scylla undergoes a metamorphosis. After listening to Galatea's story, Scylla rushes off to a secluded pool, avoiding the more frequented bathing places where she could encounter unwanted suitors (*Met.* 13.900-901). Followed by an annoying suitor, Glaucus, Scylla now behaves exactly the way Polyphemus had accused Galatea of: she quickly runs away (908-909). Glaucus is now the self-interested narrator who tries to seduce his audience into believing a wondrous tale (935: *res similis fictae, sed quid mihi fingere prodest?*), just as Ovid himself did at the onset of Scylla's story when he pretended to question the "validity of poetic tradition" (Nagle 1988: 90).[12] Once more shedding her role, Scylla now becomes the addressee of a male's wooing speech that Galatea was before. Glaucus recounts his transformation into a sea-god due to the consumption of strange herbs (916-956).[13] His half-way metamorphosis anticipates Scylla's fate (Hardie 2009: 60; Hopman 2012: 241): half of her body will also be changed to animal limbs through the magical herbs. Although she has just heard about the risks of rejecting suitors, she does not take Galatea's "cautionary tale" (Pietropaolo 2018: 196) to her heart: like an elegiac *puella dura* (Jouteur 2009: 54), she rejects Glaucus outright, seeing neither the similarities between herself and Galatea (nymphs sprinting away), nor those between Polyphemus and Glaucus: unwanted suitors with extraordinary bodily features and verbose wooing attempts, both ending with the peroration that their efforts are futile if/since the courted nymph still resists (13.869 and 965).

Pharmaka against the bruised male ego

Glaucus, however, intends to alter the situation through magical help: he asks Circe for a love-potion. The powerful sorceress and "goddess of metamorphosis" now becomes an iconic "unifying figure" between *Met.* 13 and 14 (Segal 1968: 441). Not only does she dominate the second half of the "little *Aeneid*" (Otis 1970: 288), but she "enables Roman legend and history to be accommodated to the account of natural causes through metamorphosis, all brought about by the arbitrary exercise of divine power" (Tissol 1997: 214). Her rampant sexuality

[11] Parallels between Narcissus and Polyphemus, including allusive wording in Polyphemus' speech, are outlined in Pietropaolo 2018: 201-206.

[12] Drawing on Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Nagle analyzes the entire episode with the overlapping love-triangles as a sequence of narrative seduction and erotic seduction through narrative (1988: 75-76).

[13] Glaucus' transformation is already mentioned in *Met*. 7, when Medea – Circe's niece – roams about in the same area, looking for herbs to help Jason. The narrative pattern of a young man asking for magical help with the result of an unhappy amorous entanglement is reiterated in the love-triangle Scylla-Glaucus-Circe in Book 13. On parallels between Medea and Circe in Ovid, see Segal 2002: 19-20.

renders her even more paradigmatic for the *Metamorphoses*' pairing of violence and eroticism as narrative drives. As a "highly eroticized figure, susceptible to love at first sight" (Segal 2002: 22), she immediately falls in love with Glaucus herself (14.25-27) and tries to persuade him into accepting her instead of Scylla. To that end, she utilizes the stereotype of the unsuccessful lover who loves what flees from him, but unlike Polyphemus or the standard *poeta amator*, she expresses the pointlessness of the constellation: "Much better would you follow one whose strong desire and prayer was even as your own, whose heart burned with an equal flame" (28-29). From the "unsuccessful suitor", Glaucus now turns into the "unresponsive beloved" (Nagle 1988: 82), while Scylla, albeit against her will and in her complete ignorance, becomes Circe's erotic rival in the new love-triangle (Papaioannou 2005: 399), thus re-enacting the role of Acis from Galatea's story: she, too, is to be the victim of a passionate brute's indirect revenge.[14] Yet Glaucus and Circe also re-enact the unhappy love story of Aeneas and Dido: Glaucus' journey from Greece over Messina to Aeaea (14.1-9) mirrors Aeneas' route (Tissol 1997: 210), and his marvellous aquatic deification "anticipates the apotheosis of Aeneas" (Ellsworth 1986: 31). Both Glaucus and Aeneas are "strangers come by sea asking the ruler of the place, a woman, for help", they ultimately reject and leave her, whereas she "turns her hostility, in one case, against another women, in the other, against herself" (1986: 30). Unwilling and unable to afflict any magic on Glaucus, a fellow deity (14.40-41), Circe reacts to his rejection by preparing a trap for Scylla. Ovid's sorceress, like her Odyssean model, embodies "the malignant and wildly destructive side of female passion" (Segal 1968: 439). Her "inner irrationality finds outward form in magic, which, after all, is the arbitrary, topsy-turvy reversal of nature's processes for private aims" (1968: 439). Circe's magic enables her to directly translate her jealousy into action (2002: 23). As a site for her act of revenge, she chooses Scylla's favorite maritime *locus amoenus* (14.52). With noxious herbs, spells, and rituals, she poisons violates the peaceful landscape (Hopman 2012: 243).[15] Her witchcraft, "working as it does through the body's appetites" (Segal 2002: 1), takes effect when Scylla is about to cool her body. As with Narcissus in *Met.* 3, the "surface of a body of water is the plane of self-division" (Hardie 2009: 65). When Scylla immerses herself in the calm water, the lower part of her body is transformed into a horrible canine monster:

> This pool, before the maiden's coming, the goddess befouls and contaminates with poisons potent in generating deformity. Hereupon she sprinkles liquors brewed from noxious roots, and a charm, dark with its maze of uncanny words, thrice nine times she murmurs over with lips well skilled in magic. Then Scylla comes and wades waist-deep into the water; when all at once she sees her loins disfigured with barking monster-shapes. And at the first, not believing that these are parts of her own body, she flees in fear and tries to drive away the boisterous, barking things. But what she flees she takes along with her; and, feeling for her thighs, her legs, her feet, she finds in place of these

[14] Nagle lists parallels in wording and behavior between Scylla and Acis (1988: 83, footnote 11). For Hopman, however, Scylla and Acis *contrast* each other as Acis' story ends positively for him, bringing him closer to his true self, while Scylla's metamorphosis alienates her from her body (2012: 250). Hopman links this complementarity to an asymmetry between genders (women being more vulnerable) that is thematized in this episode.

[15] Landscape in Ovid's *Met*. often mirrors the violence that happens to women being raped (Hinds 2002: 130-136).

> only gaping dogs' heads, such as a Cerberus might have. She stands on ravening dogs, and her docked loins and her womb are enclosed in a circle of beastly forms (14.55-67).

In the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, Circe's magic directly threatens masculine authority. But Ovid's Circe is first and foremost concerned with the "sexual degradation of her rival" (Segal 2002: 23) which subsequently leads to Scylla being a challenge for patriarchal heroism. In modelling the girl into a dangerous *vagina dentata*, Circe attains her epic role indirectly – she turns the nymph into an instrument for her anger over amorous rejection and sexual frustration. The transformation is erotically motivated (Jouteur 2009: 54) and sexual in nature: what Circe seeks to destroy is essentially Scylla's sex appeal whose "sexual parts become particularly ugly and fearful" (Segal 2002: 23). Her genitals and uterus being mutilated and exposed (*Met.* 14.67), the sexually reluctant nymph suddenly faces a horridly contorted defloration: "the body parts that precisely define her virginity are conflated with their opposite, the heads of raging and promiscuous dogs" (Hopman 2012: 231). A product of the witch's magic, the new Scylla has taken on some of Circe's characteristics (Hopman 2012: 243). Since Scylla is now condemned to an "excessive sexuality" (Hardie 2009: 65) similar to Circe's, the initial description appears in a new light: the phrase "in a distant time, she was a virgin" (*Met.* 13.734) refers "not just to her previous physical shape, but also to her formerly intact virginity, now compromised by descent into a monstrous and metamorphic sexuality" (Hardie 2009: 65). The readers gaze at Scylla's "corps en devenir" (Jouteur 2009: 53) from top to bottom, almost voyeuristically, at the very same time as she herself scrutinizes her thighs, legs, and feet (*Met.* 14.64). Suddenly being both, a chaste virgin and a rabid monster, Scylla's body becomes the surface onto which the male gaze inscribes the virgin/whore dichotomy: she combines the two patriarchal concepts of femininity – maidenly virtue and excessive lust (cf. Hardie 2009: 66). Moreover, she now embodies the two contradictory roles in one body that have previously been split between herself, the fleeing nymph, and Glaucus, the lover chasing her (*Met.* 14.62-63). This "contagious transfer" (Hopman 2012: 242) of words, behavior, experience, or even shape from rapist to maiden is a form of appropriating interpenetration that can be compared to other unrequited sexual advances in the *Met.* in which the persecutor succeeds in gaining influence and power, albeit not sexually in the strict sense, over an object of desire. Through Glaucus' intervention, Scylla's waist is transformed through herbs, just as his waist was before.[16] Scylla's new canine lower body is a crude inversion of her previous rejection of sexuality: "Erotic *fastidium* is punished by a far more visceral form of disgust, *fastidium*" (Hardie 2009: 64).

As a result, Scylla experiences alienation from her own body: she "loses familiarity with her body as it is transformed, and tries to flee, initially in disbelief, from the monstrous appendages that are now part of herself" (Tissol 1997: 60). Ovid's humorous stance on the fictionality of the subject and Glaucus' autobiographic narration already anticipated someone in- or outside the narrative who would doubt the metamorphoses' realism. Now we see that the incredulous skepticism about supernatural transformations has been "transferred from the poet's readers to the subject of metamorphosis herself" (Hardie 2009: 62). Scylla both questions and abhors her transformation: in conformity with the stereotypical patriarchal anxiety over female sexuality, she experiences "repulsion from her own voracious sexuality" (2009: 66) which she cannot deny and hide, not even from herself, anymore. The dogs' first

[16] Interestingly, archaic depictions of Scylla show her with a fish tail as well. In Ovid's *Met.*, this hybridized body part is externalized and attributed to her suitor instead.

victim is Scylla herself: the new animal part is separate from and even hostile towards the remaining human part. Self-laceration, hence, precedes her notorious aggression against others, which is why Hardie speaks of a self-division that "Scylla shares with the personification of *Inuidia* [Envy] in book two, who tortures herself at the same time as she attacks others" – a fitting comparand as "the dog is a standard symbol of *inuidia*" (70). Horace, for instance, links envy and "doggishness" in the portray of the "canine" witch Canidia in his *Epod.* 5 (Oliensis 1991: 117-118). While Envy is infamously *edax* and therefore jealously consuming herself, Scylla is infamously *rapax* and *uorax*: her epic role is that of an ever-hungry man-eater. Ovid's Scylla, however, combines both nightmarish thoughts: first, her canine half assaults her human half; only then she takes on the anthropophagous tendencies she had in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.

The rest of the story is told quickly: Scylla stays where she is and seizes the first opportunity to take revenge: "to vent her hate on Circe, she robbed Ulysses of his companions" (*Met.* 14.70-71). Again, a main concern of Homer's *Od.* 12 – Odysseus' encounter with Scylla – is reinterpreted as a personal act of revenge between women. Scylla has obviously learned from Circe the art of indirect punishment: to hurt her, she attacks her lover. She has apparently overcome the self-division that tortured her after her transformation: now, she is clearly capable of using her monstrous parts for her own purposes and, hence, of fulfilling her epic role. Ovid, in turn, might be using her monstrous parts for his own purposes, as Stephen Hinds suggests *per litteras*: when Scylla attacks Odysseus' crew, "could she be applying the bite of literary invidiousness to the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*?".

Forever frozen: Scylla's appropriation of the voyeuristic gaze

The canine metamorphosis is not the last transformation Scylla undergoes. After the long etiological digression, Ovid brings us back to Aeneas' voyage and mentions briefly that the Trojans can pass Scylla safely because she no longer is the man-eating monster but has become petrified in the meantime: "She also would have wrecked the Trojan ships had she not before their coming been changed into a rock which stands there to this day. Sailors also avoid the rock" (*Met.* 14.72-74). The petrification is Ovid's idea, yet perhaps inspired by her earlier epithet πετραίη that refers to her preference for rocky dwelling places rather than her own rockiness (Papaioannou 2005: 395-396). Scylla's transformation into a cliff serves one poetic function: it differs from Virgil's account. While Aeneas' Virgilian crew had to use oars and muscles to escape the sea-monster (*Aen.* 3.558-560), salvation in Ovid's *Met.*, by contrast, "does not come from human abilities […] but from chance. Simply put, [Ovid's] Aeneas would not have escaped had it not been for Scylla's petrification. Thus, heroic skills are replaced with the power of the metamorphic world [which] leaves little space for heroes and their helpers" (Hopman 2012: 238). The Scylla that Aeneas encounters in the *Met.* is a harmless, motionless stone – a geographical landmark "which bridges myth and reality" (Lowe 2015: 80) and designates "the crossing to a new world, a snapshot that captures a representative part of a life one leaves behind permanently, or even a memory in which one may nostalgically indulge in peace" (Papaioannou 2005: 396). While the threatening monster needed assertions of credibility and metaliterary comments on fictionality and poetic license, a geological formation satisfies even the Hellenistic taste for myth rationalizations (Hardie 2009: 61; Lowe 2015: 78-80). For Ovid, who clearly has no problem with supernatural elements in his narrative, Scylla's second transformation provides stability in a world of constant flux: the petrification is final, a "definite, irreversible departure from the Homeric world and its monsters" (Papaioannou 2005:

403; cf. Hardie 2009: 59). Scylla the cliff becomes a permanent emblem of poetic fiction: her past as a fleeing nymph and an ever-shifting hybrid are preserved in the stone statue that the "obsessive visualiser" (Hardie 2002: 6) Ovid erects for her – her stone monument which is still dreaded by sailors, and Ovid's textual label next to it with etiological and historical summary.

Scylla's metamorphic appearance in three different shapes – maiden, monster, and rock – can prompt associations with a tripartite coming-of-age scenario of the kind that French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep described (1969 14-27). The observant reader of all the "nymph and suitor" tales in Ovid's *Met.* already knows this structure of initiation rites from Europa or Proserpina. Scylla's development is likewise sexual, but unlike that of other maidens, the separation rites pushing her into the alienating liminal phase – monstrosity – do not involve rape through a male aggressor: instead, another woman deflowers the nymph violently, out of envy and jealousy, and separates her not only from her previous social surrounding, but even from herself. Scylla subsequently learns how to use her new role: she appropriates the monstrosity projected upon her and utilizes her grotesque corporeality against her enemies. At first scared of her new genitals herself, she soon incorporates the lesson she learns from the sexually liberated witch: when Scylla takes what she wants, she lives up to the expectations patriarchy associates with a monstrous female. Her hybrid body, a vast assemblage of seductive femininity and menacing bitches' jaws, teeth, front legs, and claws, becomes her shield against the heroes of patriarchy, the conquerors and oppressors whose objectifying male gaze and subordinating assaults are celebrated and glorified in the epic tradition Ovid at once exemplifies and seeks to distinguish himself from. For Odysseus and his crew, Scylla – in Homer, Virgil, and Ovid's brief flashback (*Met.* 14.70-71) – acts precisely as they expect: she is a dangerous, immoderate, voracious vamp, a merciless *vagina dentata*.

But when Aeneas encounters her in *Met.* 14, Scylla has already entered a new phase that is – if we are willing to suspend disbelief and follow the work's internal logic – considered final, postliminal, and stable. Her second transformation is not as spectacular as her first, brutally conducted, one. As a rock, Scylla appears to rest in herself as though she had come to terms with her extraordinary physicality. Her femininity is no longer the passive object of patriarchal "scopophilia", the male gaze that subjugates women to spectacles "to be looked at", in Laura Mulvey's words (1988: 62). Defying this voyeuristic gaze (or σκοπή) of intradiegetic heroes and extradiegetic readers looking at her (σκοπέω), Scylla the cliff (*scopulus*) is now a triumphal icon in her own right: not only protruding, visible, and thus avoidable for sailors (*Met.* 14.74: *nauita uitat*), but also a "look-out rock", a high place with a wide view, as the etymology of *scopulus* or σκόπελος (cliff) suggests (Maltby 1991: 551). Her transformation into a cliff thus allows Scylla to gaze out from her crag upon the passing sailors. Now that men are fleeing her, the initial situation of the nymph escaping unwanted suitors is reversed completely.

No longer a spectacle or an arena for heroic feats, Scylla eventually represents the memorial of her own biography of empowerment: her final state, the *scopulus*, preserves her entire life, the *uita* that is evoked, phonetically, persistently, in the seamen (*nauita*) and in the anxieties they project upon her (*uitat*). Ovid's Scylla manages to combine the allegedly contradicting roles for women in the patriarchal imagination: she is a maiden *and* a monster, beautiful and ugly, active *and* passive, a victim *and* a perpetrator, subject to change *and* stable. The hybrid monster becomes an emblem of resistance: she defies debilitating either-or attributions, she rejects erotic advances (Glaucus), withstands the evil eye of jealousy (Circe), evades the objectifying male gaze, overcomes self-destructive dissociation (dogs), repels several heroes' violent attacks (Odysseus, Aeneas), rebuts readers' incredulous skepticism, and refuses

epic poets' demonizing projections (Homer, Virgil). Ovid's ancient monster Scylla is, it appears, not too far away from what we might consider an emancipated woman today.

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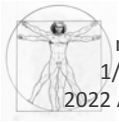

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Egoul ca monstru lăuntric în poemele lui Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī și Mahmūd Shabestarī

The Ego as an Inner Monster in the Poems of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī and Mahmūd Shabestarī

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Cuvinte-cheie

sufism; cunoaştere de sine; monstru lăuntric; „marea luptă" (*al-jihâd al-akbar*); moarte inițiatică.

În filosofia orientală, egoul este înțeles ca o falsă identitate şi ca un „nod" în fluxul existenței, constituind obstacolul major în calea eliberării din suferința ciclică a lumii. În fapt, egoul e un mod subiectiv de a interacționa cu universul înconjurător, fiind cauza haosului microcosmic. Egoul implică o manifestare a multiplicității înțeleasă ca separare (pe de o parte: eu-tu, eu-ceilalți; pe de altă parte: un anumit eu în contradicție cu un alt eu), iar contradicțiile şi suferința își au rădăcina în tendința de a privi existența individuală ca fiind separată de existența universală. În anumite poeme persane tradiționale avem de-a face chiar cu o asociere a propriului ego cu un monstru lăuntric. Fiind înțeles ca o imagine distorsionată a unei anumite realități, monstrul lăuntric apare ca fiind o reprezentare denaturată a sinelui autentic. În cadrul acestui articol, mă voi limita doar asupra analizei problemei anterioare în cadrul unor versuri ale poeților Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī şi Mahmūd Shabestarī.

Keywords

Sufism; self-knowledge; inner monster; "the great striving" (*al jihâd al akbar*); mystical death.

In Eastern philosophy, the ego is understood as a false identity and as a "knot" in the flow of existence, being the major obstacle for the liberation from the cyclical suffering of the world. In fact, the ego is a subjective way of interacting with the surrounding universe, being the cause of the microcosmic chaos. The ego implies a manifestation of multiplicity understood as separation (on the one hand: I-you, I-others; on the other hand: a certain self in contradiction with another self). Moreover, the contradictions and the suffering are rooted in the tendency to view the individual existence as being separate from the universal existence. In some traditional Persian poems, we are dealing with an association of one's ego with an inner monster. Understood as a distorted image of a certain reality, the inner monster appears as a misshapen representation of the true self. In this article, I will limit myself to the analysis of the previous issue in the verses of the poets Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī and Mahmūd Shabestarī.

Dintre temele fundamentale ale poemelor persane tradiţionale, cel mai des amintite sunt iubirea şi cunoaşterea, iar dintre simbolurile recurente, menţionăm: focul, fluturele, vinul, trandafirul şi privighetoarea. Se remarcă, în numeroase contexte, prezenţa unei perechi de simboluri care devin jumătăţi de nedespărţit ale aceleiaşi imagini simbolice. Chiar şi în urma unei analize sumare a poeziilor sufi, devine evident faptul că valenţele sale simbolice converg într-un singur punct: „mistuirea" deplină a egoului. Realizarea „mistuirii" se realizează prin cunoaştere. În sufism, cunoaşterea de acest tip e numită *ma'rifah* (**معرفة**) – având ca echivalent termenul grecesc *gnôsis* (γνῶσις) – şi este obţinută prin: moarte (disoluţia propriului ego), creaţie (sau „naşterea din nou") şi sacrificiu (cultivarea altruismului desăvârşit). Deoarece ilustrează foarte bine această ipoteză, redăm, în continuare, poezia „Cei doi prieteni" a lui Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī:

> Un om bătu la uşa prietenului drag.
> „O, cine eşti tu oare, om vrednic şi pribeag?"
> „Sunt eu!", răspunse insul. „Te du! Nu se cuvine
> să stea la masa asta un om necopt ca tine."
> „În focul surghiunirii fiinţa-ţi să se coacă,
> şi n-o să mai încerce atunci să se prefacă."
> Pleacă de-ndată omul. Călători vreun an,
> surghiunul pârjolindu-l cu focul său avan.
> Şi ars de-acea văpaie dar şi cu mintea coaptă,
> se-ntoarse la amicu-i, să vadă de-l aşteaptă.
> Bătu din nou la uşă cu teamă şi-umilinţă,
> ca nu cumva să-i scape iar vreo necuviinţă.
> Şi-l întrebă amicul: „Cine-i la uşă-acu?"
> Şi omul îi răspunse: „La uşă eşti chiar tu!"
> Prietenul îi zise: „O, intră, eu al meu,
> căci tu eşti eu şi-n casă nu-i loc pentru-un alt eu."
> „Al aţei dublu capăt nu-i acului pe plac.
> Cum însă-acum eşti unul, hai, intră-n acest ac!" (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 216)

Acest tip de „moarte" este descris în numeroase alte versuri ale poemelor persane, cum sunt poeziile: „Dascălul şi luntraşul" (203) sau „Rugul" (234). Când este întrebat de unde vine şi încotro se îndreaptă, dervişul rătăcitor răspunde fără ezitare şi cu o deplină naturaleţe: de la Dumnezeu către Dumnezeu. Afirmaţia că „nu există nimic în afara lui Dumnezeu" e una din axiomele des întâlnite atât în mistica orientală, cât şi în cea occidentală: „Nu există nimic în care el să nu fie, căci toate sunt în el şi el este totul" (Hermes, 2015: 63). Pentru a împrumuta o idee a lui Joseph Campbell, vom observa că, „dacă cineva devine propriul zeu, atunci Dumnezeu însuşi, voinţa lui Dumnezeu, puterea care ar distruge sistemul său egocentric, devine monstrul" (Campbell, 2014: 63). Aşadar, moartea iniţiatică, ca treaptă a desăvârşirii spirituale, implică confruntarea „gardianului monstruos" şi obţinerea unei victorii decisive. Necesitatea acestei etape se datorează faptului că egoul şi divinitatea sunt incompatibili – nici unul, nici celălalt nu se poate manifesta în totalitate decât în lipsa celuilalt.

Având în vedere dificultatea de înţelegere a principiilor sufismului, această mişcare spirituală a fost destul de controversată de-a lungul vremii[1]. Cu toate acestea, deschiderea spre a aprofunda studiul simbolurilor şi al ideilor pe care le propune (în aparenţă, contradictorii cu anumite principii morale) are ca rezultat descoperirea unei minunate fuziuni dintre poezie, filosofie şi mistică. Poezia sufi înglobează năzuinţele mistice în cadrul următoarelor simboluri: fluturele (ca simbol al sufletului care este mistuit de flacăra iubirii), vinul (ca simbol al cunoaşterii), ebrietatea (ca „beţie a extazului" mistic), Iubitul sau Prietenul (Dumnezeu). Aşadar, poeţii sufiţi se adresau cu precădere unui public care cunoştea codul simbolic al căilor spirituale. În cadrul doctrinei sufi, pot fi observate numeroase similitudini cu alte religii (hinduism, budism, zoroastrism, creştinism şi iudaism) şi curente filosofice (stoicismul şi neoplatonismul fiind, poate, cele mai grăitoare exemple în acest sens): „[…] o sinteză nu mai puţin «improbabilă» între maniheismul iranian, neo-platonism şi islamism se înfăptuise totuşi în Arabia, încă din secolul al IX-lea, sinteză care, pe deasupra, se afirmase prin intermediul unei poezii religioase ale cărei metafore erotice prezintă cele mai surprinzătoare asemănări cu metaforele curteneşti" (Rougemont, 1987: 111).

Deşi există mai multe etimologii ale cuvântului „sufism", acesta a existat cu mult înainte de a fi desemnat prin numele său – fiind un mod de viaţă având la bază apropierea faţă de Dumnezeu prin cunoaştere mistică, iubire şi asceză (Olaru, 2013: 83-144). În plus, recunoaşterea nulităţii propriului ego în faţa unui principiu existenţial superior este unul din fundamentele sufismului. Însăşi structura generală a Islamului are ca pilon central doctrina Unităţii (*at-tawhid*): „Cuvântul «islam» înseamnă supunere, iar cuvântul *musulman* înseamnă «supus»; desigur, supus lui Dumnezeu = *Allah*" (Stan & Rus, 1991: 287) – cu atât mai mult este dezvoltat acest raport om-divinitate în cadrul misticii islamice.

Ca în cadrul oricărei religii sau grupări spirituale importante, şi în sufism există trei trepte de înţelegere a doctrinei: o treaptă iniţială (*shariah*), una intermediară (*tariqah*) şi, în fine, o treaptă finală (*ma'rifah*). Înţelegerea specifică primei trepte este axată pe dezvoltarea (spirituală) individuală, practicantul fiind conştient de faptul că „ce e al meu e al meu şi ce e al tău e al tău". În cadrul treptei intermediare (*tariqah*), aspirantul realizează că „ce e al tău e al meu şi ce e al meu e al tău" şi, în fine, în ultimă instanţă, atitudinea posesivă şi ataşamentul faţă de lucrurile materiale dispare în totalitate. Astfel, treapta finală de înţelegere a sufismului (caracteristică doar maestrului) implică o cunoaştere (*ma'rifah*) a adevărului (*haqiqah*) unităţii tuturor lucrurilor, care e sintetizată prin afirmaţia că: nimic nu-mi aparţine mie sau ţie, pentru că nu există „eu" şi „tu". Analizând implicaţiile acestor afirmaţii, e lesne de înţeles de ce este necesară o instruire distinctă pentru fiecare treaptă de înţelegere a doctrinei. Practicanţii primei trepte de înţelegere se axează, cu precădere, pe desăvârşirea unui comportament etic, practicanţii celei de-a doua trepte au ca principală aspiraţie dorinţa de a-i ajuta pe ceilalţi, iar practicanţii celei de-a treia trepte dobândesc accesul la tehnici şi metode extrem de puternice, ce-i vor ajuta în efortul lor de edificare spirituală.

Punctul spre care converg aceste trepte de înţelegere este conştientizarea importanţei eliminării voinţei egoiste şi dezvoltarea unui altruism dezinteresat. Această structură tripartită este asemenea unei piramide pe care individul o construieşte treaptă cu treaptă. Ele se completează reciproc şi atingerea treptelor superioare de înţelegere nu exclude continuarea îndeplinirii celor inferioare (cu alte cuvinte, niciun practicant serios nu va pretinde că poate

[1] Luând în discuţie o perspectivă istorică, sufismul este un curent apărut în secolul al VIII-lea şi răspândit (mai ales) în Persia. Naşterea sufismului are loc în estul Orientului Mijlociu şi este favorizată, ulterior, de fuga artiştilor persani din faţa invaziei mongolilor, care nu agreau stilul „sofisticat" al acestora.

renunţa la principiile etice sub pretextul ca a atins nivelul maestrului). Desăvârşirea principiilor etice este fundamentul pe care poate fi construit edificiul spiritului.

În acest context, pot fi amintite câteva principii de bază ale sufismului: „Abu'l-Hassan Nuri a spus: «Sufismul e renunţarea la plăcerile egoiste». […] Abu'l-Hassan Nuri a spus de asemenea: «Sufit e cel ce nu posedă nimic şi nu e posedat de nimic»" (Vitray-Mayerovitch, 2003: 90). Realizarea caracterului tranzitoriu al existenţei este principalul motiv pentru care sufismul e caracterizat de o atitudine de detaşare faţă de lucrurile materiale şi de o aspiraţie către un mod de viaţă cât se poate de profund. Această atitudine este des întâlnită în majoritatea religiilor şi în cadrul mai multor curente filosofice atât din spaţiul oriental[2], cât şi din cel occidental[3]. În fine, trebuie remarcată şi importanţa pe care o are momentul prezent în cadrul sufismului.

Toată viaţa sa, dervişul rătăcitor este un călător în lume, întotdeauna „drumeţind în sine" şi reflectând o constantă a destinului uman: dorinţa de a cunoaşte pământul şi de a cuceri „cerul". În gândirea greco-arabă (de inspiraţie peripatetică şi neoplatonică) este întotdeauna vorba de un „cer inteligibil". Pentru a înţelege legătura acestuia cu pământul (microcosmic), putem aminti apropierea simbolică dintre apă şi oglindă. Oglinda este un instrument prin care observatorul se poate privi pe sine pentru a se cunoaşte. În aceeaşi manieră, apa e o modalitate a cerului de a se reflecta pe pământ.

Din punct de vedere alegoric, se poate afirma că cerul e o expresie a divinului, pe când pământul e o expresie a umanului. După o lungă „rătăcire", dervişul descoperă că el însuşi este o oglindă a lumii şi că are posibilitatea de a privi lumea prin ochiul lui Dumnezeu, care e „cupa cu cel mai limped vin" – după cum evidenţiază Mahmūd Shabestarī:

> Bea vin, căci de-al tău sine ţi-aduce liberarea,
> să poată stropul vieţii-a se contopi cu Marea.
> Bea vinul din pocalul Obrazului divin,
> căci ochiul Lui e cupa cu cel mai limped vin.
> Să cauţi vinul fără de cupă sau ulcior,
> căci vinu-i şi paharnic, pocal şi băutor. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 278)

„Beţia" este o alegorie a meditaţiei profunde din care misticul îşi „soarbe" cunoaşterea (sau „vinul"). Modul de existenţă al fiecărei fiinţe este în directă legătură cu gradul de profunzime al percepţiei. Cu cât percepţia este mai pătrunzătoare, cu atât legătura dintre natură şi observatorul acesteia devine mai profundă. Având în vedere că natura (sau „creaţia") este oglinda Creatorului, doar Acesta poate avea o percepţie completă asupra creaţiei. Se spune că Dumnezeu caută vidul din inima omului pentru a-l umple. Din acest motiv, dervişul rătăcitor doreşte să abandoneze propria sa perspectivă limitată şi să privească lumea cu ochiul lui Dumnezeu. Poezia sufi subliniază, în repetate rânduri, că acest tip de percepţie e singurul mod prin care cunoscătorul poate înţelege, în mod plenar, obiectul cunoaşterii.

Orice formă de expunere discursivă se dovedeşte inadecvată pentru a explica ceea ce este cunoaşterea autentică *ma'rifah* (**معرفة**) şi, de aceea, limbajul său este simbolic prin excelenţă. Acest „limbaj" apare mai degrabă ca o contemplaţie în timpul căreia raţiunile subiective dispar,

[2] Filosofia budistă, conform căreia întreaga existenţă (manifestată) este o iluzie (*maya*), ar fi exemplul cel mai relevant în acest sens.

[3] Stoicismul fiind unul din curentele filosofice în care atitudinea de detaşare (şi chiar de dezgust) faţă de trup şi materie este deosebit de pronunţată.

fiind înlocuite, întotdeauna, de un tip de inspiraţie. De multe ori, inspiraţia este simbolizată în versurile persane prin starea de beţie. Chiar şi lumea întreagă e asemănată unei „crâşme" în care toţi oamenii sorb din cupa vieţii, a cunoaşterii şi a iubirii.

În contextul poemelor sufi, cunoaşterea nu implică în niciun fel o afirmare a mentalului în detrimentul atitudinii afective. Din perspectiva anterioară, poezia nu poate fi separată de iubire, iar iubirea nu poate fi separată de cunoaştere. În ceea ce priveşte acest tip de cunoaştere, „organul cognitiv" este inima (*qalb*), care este simbolizată prin imaginea ulciorului sau a cupei: „În literatura mistică a Islamului, cupa simbolizează în general inima, cu sensul de intuiţie, de subtilitate a sufletului" (Chevalier; Gheerbrant, 1994: 417) – de aceea, apare des invocat motivul cupei ce trebuie umplută cu vinul cunoaşterii:

> Şi bolta se roteşte-ameţită pe deplin,
> râvnind doar la mireasma acelui unic vin.
> Heruvii beau din cupe-acel vin curat şi sfânt,
> iar drojdia rămasă o varsă pe pământ.
> [...]
> Un strop îl face pe-unul a fi tot mai smerit.
> O cupă-l face pe-altul s-ajungă îndrăgostit.
> Un altul vezi că soarbe doar dintr-o-nghiţitură,
> şi crâşmă şi paharnic, beţiv şi băutură.
> Pe toate le înghite şi-ar mai sorbi avan.
> Ţi-e inima cât marea, hei, straşnic beţivan! (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 267)

În versurile anterioare este accentuat faptul că inima este cea care „înghite" întreaga cunoaştere. *Focul lichid* (sau vinul) este, de asemenea, simbolul mistuirii propriului ego, până când personalitatea umană îşi pierde conturul în nemărginire. Departe de a fi doar o dispariţie a individualităţii, acest tip de „mistuire" e o expresie deplină a „contopirii" cu divinul adorat. Natura iubirii este unitatea absolută şi, din această cauză, nici o formă de dualitate (eu şi tu) nu poate exista în cadrul acelei realităţi. Prin urmare, îndrăgostitul învaţă că pentru a se contopi cu „focul" iubirii, trebuie să devină „foc". Abandonând definitiv condiţia anterioară acestei interacţiuni, el descoperă un nou mod de *a fi*.

Aşadar, în poemele persane, focul reprezintă „instrumentul" prin care este atinsă atât iubirea desăvârşită, cât şi moartea mistică (*fana*[4]) sau „Realizarea prin anihilare". În cazul menţionat anterior, focul apare ca fiind lichid, deci o „apă ignigenă" care îmbină două elemente (aparent) contradictorii. După cum am observat deja, *focul lichid* este sugerat de poeţii sufi prin imaginea vinului. „Vinul" este obţinut doar cu preţul sacrificiului de sine, deoarece iubirea are ca ţel recunoaşterea unităţii tuturor formelor existente şi contopirea dintre cunoscător şi cunoscut. Cunoaşterea dobândită prin iubire este intuitivă, constituind o revelaţie ce „se odihneşte" în inima îndrăgostitului. În plus, dualitatea contradictorie (apă-foc), care este prezentă în simbolistica vinului, se află în directă legătură cu problema dualităţii (eu-tu) din cadrul percepţiei subiective. Alegerea acestui simbol se dovedeşte extraordinar de sugestivă: cel ce consumă „foc" este consumat de „foc". Prin urmare, ceea ce e atins de „foc" devine „foc".

[4] Din arabă (فناء), însemnând „extincţie" sau „evanescenţă" – e deci un concept contrar lui *baqa* (subzistenţă).

Calea iubirii (*al-mahabbah*) e una din cele trei căi[5] prin care omul aspiră către împlinire. Din această perspectivă, cunoaşterea e obţinută atât prin iubire, cât şi prin supunere (sau „frică") şi, astfel, cele trei converg într-un singur punct, devenind un tot unitar. Ahmad ibn al-Arif spunea despre iubire că este: „începutul căilor extincției" (*fana*). Depăşirea formelor şi (re)dobândirea unităţii primordiale este simbolizată uneori prin imaginea apei şi, adesea, prin imaginea focului mistuitor. Dacă elementul acvatic e caracterizat printr-o „acceptare" (aproape maternă) şi printr-o tendinţă de înglobare şi „omogenizare" a contrariilor, elementul ignic dizolvă contrariile într-o manieră ireversibilă. Din acest motiv, focul este simbolul preferat de poezia persană pentru a sugera natura iubirii, dar şi un anume fel de supra-individualitate.

Deşi o înţelegere literală a ideilor anterioare ne conduce către o perspectivă nihilistă, o interpretare mai profundă ne ajută să înţelegem că interdependenţa e pilonul central al oricărei individualităţi şi că niciun „eu" nu există în mod independent. În cadrul spiritualităţii orientale se spune adesea că individul este „totul şi nimic". Totuşi, aceasta nu înseamnă o negare a „sinelui", ci o înţelegere a acestuia într-un ansamblu spaţial şi temporal. Făcând o paralelă cu o altă doctrină filosofico-religioasă, putem aminti că în budism se afirmă că natura ultimă a „Sinelui" (*Ātman*) este „Non-sinele" (*Anātman*) sau „Vidul" (*Śūnyatā*). Aceasta deoarece „Sinele" există doar într-un context spaţial şi temporal precis, pe când „Non-sinele" nu depinde de vreo constrângere spaţio-temporală. „Non-sinele" sau „Vidul", nu trebuie înţeles ca un „nimic", ci ca un „altceva" ce nu poate fi caracterizat prin niciunul din atributele lucrurilor, fiinţelor sau fenomenelor din sfera existenţei. O interpretare nihilistă a poeziei persane e posibilă doar dacă filosofia orientală este studiată în afara propriului ei specific. În mod aparent paradoxal, poemele persane utilizează motivul vidului ca pe o expresie a unităţii tuturor lucrurilor: „The use of the void in Islamic art is one of the most important direct consequences for art of the metaphysical principle of Unity (although it is not the sole effect of this principle), for nearly every facet of Islamic art is in one way or another related to this principle and its ramifications in the world of multiplicity" (Nasr, 1987: 185).

După observaţiile anterioare, vor putea fi mai uşor înţelese versurile poeţilor persani care vorbesc despre problema individualităţii. Iată, de pildă, poemul „Ulcioare şi talazuri suntem" scris de Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī:

> O, câte lumi ascunde eternul Duh în sine!
> O, cât de largă-i marea acelei Minţi divine!
> Iar ale noastre forme gonesc pe-această mare,
> plutind pe faţa apei precum nişte ulcioare.
> Plutesc cât timp sunt goale pe ale mării unde,
> şi-ndată ce se umplu încep să se cufunde.
> Ascuns rămâne Duhul şi lumea doar apare.
> Suntem talazul mării sau spuma-i trecătoare. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 240)

O idee asemănătoare este reluată şi în poezia „Ulciorul inimii" („De vântul pustiirii lăuntrul de ţi-e plin,/ pe faţa apei lumii, tihnit pluti-vei lin"), aparţinând aceluiaşi autor. „Vidul" interior sau „vântul pustiirii" este un alt mod de a numi „Non-sinele" (*Anātman*) din cadrul filosofiei budiste. Având în vedere că orice „eu" e doar un val pe „marea vieţii", înţelegerea

[5] Celelalte două fiind: calea cunoaşterii (*al-ma'rifah*) şi calea fricii (*al-khawf*). Interesant de remarcat e că aceste concepte sunt întâlnite într-o formă foarte asemănătoare şi în Orient. În hinduism, de exemplu, acestea sunt numite: calea cunoaşterii (*jnana*), calea iubirii sau a devoţiunii (*bhakti*) şi calea acţiunii (*karma*).

impermanenţei propriului ego echivalează cu depăşirea limitărilor impuse de identificarea cu acesta.

Depăşirea individualităţii egocentrice şi cunoaşterea de sine care rezultă din aceasta este prezentată şi în poemul lui Mahmud Shabestarī, intitulat „Grădina Tainei" (*Golşan-e Roz*). Prima referire directă la ea apare chiar în prolog: „Când se văzu că este-o fiinţă mai anume,/ el [Adam] se-ntrebă de-ndată: *Eu cine-s oare-n lume?*". În cadrul sufismului, cunoaşterea de sine e prezentată ca o alegorie a „drumeţiei" – omul fiind doar un „călător în lume" al cărui principal obiectiv este de „a drumeţi în sine". Una din cele 15 întrebări prezente în „Grădina Tainei" detaliază această idee:

> ÎNTREBAREA 3
> Eu cine-s oare, cine? Şi ce ştiu despre mine?
> Şi ce poate să-nsemne: „a drumeţi în tine?"
> RĂSPUNS
> „Eu cine-s oare, cine?" — tu mă întrebi mereu —
> „Vorbeşte-mi despre mine, să aflu cine-s eu!"
> Suprema Existenţă când se vădeşte-n lume,
> cuvântul eu devine atuncea al Ei nume.
> Şi eu şi tu deci suntem sclipirile ce-apar
> prin zăbrelita nişă din sfântul Ei fanar.
> [...]
> Un rai e Existenţa şi-un iad ce-i trecător,
> şi eu şi tu la mijloc, drept văl despărţitor. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 257-258)

„Eu cine-s oare, cine?" – prin această întrebare este reluată şi analizată mai amplu una din întrebările ce apar în prologul poemului („Eu cine-s oare-n lume?"). În filosofia orientală, egoul este înţeles ca un nod în fluxul existenţei, împiedicând eliberarea din cadrul suferinţei ciclice a lumii. „Eu"-ul e „unitatea multiplă imperfectă" pentru că implică o separare (pe de o parte: eu-tu, eu-ceilalţi; pe de altă parte: un anumit *eu* în contradicţie cu un alt *eu*). Când omul îşi pune întrebarea „cine sunt?", la un ultim nivel de înţelegere, termenul „eu" nu are ce căuta în această ecuaţie pentru că ar altera percepţia obiectivă a problemei în cauză. Este necesar, desigur, să existe o distincţie între cel ce percepe şi ceea ce este perceput, între un observator şi alt observator, totuşi, în ultimă instanţă, totul se reduce la unitate, iar aceasta implică o delimitare în nedelimitat, o conştiinţă care să realizeze că face parte dintr-un „tot" şi, în acelaşi timp, că este individualizată. În spaţiul occidental, această ipoteză a fost studiată în profunzime de către neoplatonicieni, iar dihotomia unu-multiplu a constituit una dintre cele mai dezbătute probleme filosofice. Asupra dificultăţii de a înţelege chestiunea anterioară suntem avertizaţi în următorul fragment al aceluiaşi poem:

> Stricat ajunge miezul migdalei de l-ai scos
> din coaja lui când crud e şi apos.
> Doar când migdala-i coaptă, de ea tu să ai parte,
> şi-atunci scoate-i miezul, dând coaja la o parte.
> [...]
> Iar când drumeţul de la izvorul sfânt se-adapă,
> e copt de-acum miezul şi coaja-i atunci crapă,

Străin de lumea-aceasta un alt drumeţ devine,
şi contopit cu Domnul, în ea nu mai revine. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 262)

Trăind cu intensitate sentimentul iubirii, sufletul uman tinde spre contopirea cu obiectul adorat, care, în cazul poemelor sufi, este divinul. Acest tip de „fuziune" dintre uman şi divin este rezultatul unei „mistuiri" desăvârşite a individualităţii egocentrice. La un astfel de nivel al trăirii, divinul este singurul motiv al iubirii. Au existat, în toate timpurile, indivizi care au atins desăvârşirea, dizolvând graniţa dintre uman şi divin. În cadrul culturii persane, relevant este cazul lui Mansur Al-Hallaj, condamnat la moarte pentru că a afirmat: „Eu sunt Adevărul" (care, în spiritualitatea islamică, echivalează cu afirmaţia „Eu sunt Dumnezeu"). Aici e vorba de glasul divinului adorat (sau al „Iubitului") care vorbeşte prin intermediul persoanei care a devenit una cu El.

Se spune că atunci când se priveşte în apă (sau în oglindă) cel care nu iubeşte cu adevărat îşi vede propriul său chip, pe când cel într-adevăr îndrăgostit vede chipul fiinţei iubite. Dervişul rătăcitor este îndrăgostit de Dumnezeu, al cărui chip îl vede reflectat în toată creaţia, inclusiv în sine însuşi: „[Abu Yazid Bistami] a răspuns: «M-am despuiat de mine ca un şarpe de pielea sa; mi-am contemplat esenţa existenţei mele şi iată că eram El.»" (*apud* Dumitriu, 1990: 193). Un fragment din *Grădina Tainei* a lui Mahmūd Shabestarī dezvoltă ideea anterioară:

ÎNTREBAREA 13
Ce spune cel ce-aflat-a deplinul adevăr
din ochi şi aluniţă, din buze şi din păr?
RĂSPUNS
Tot ce-n această lume vedem şi poartă nume,
Reflex e-al celui Soare ce dăinue-n cea lume.
A Lui e Frumuseţea şi-Atotputernicia,
şi faţa-i ca şi părul-i ne-aduc doar mărturia. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 275)

Natura sau creaţia este oglinda Creatorului, reflectându-i Acestuia atributele, fără a le separa de natura Sa ultimă şi „ne-creată". Atributele divine apar ca fiind distorsionate (pe suprafaţa „oglinzii" existenţei), fie atunci când aceasta se îndepărtează prea mult de Cel pe care îl reflectă, fie când între creaţie şi Creator apare un obstacol care limitează sau modifică percepţia. Esenţa Creatorului se află, deci, în tot ce există, dar nu tot ce există reflectă cu fidelitate imaginea Creatorului. La nivel microcosmic, atributele Creatorului se află în stare latentă şi potenţială, asemenea unor seminţe. După cădere, omul nu mai reflectă „chipul şi asemănarea lui Dumnezeu", dar păstrează totuşi această posibilitate sub forma unei esenţe arhetipale situată în profunzimile fiinţei sale. Dezvoltarea acestei esenţe presupune o micro-geneză prin care omul devine un *microtheos*.

Orice evoluţie (fizică sau spirituală) presupune şi o involuţie (înţeleasă ca sacrificiu). Aşa cum transformarea materiei unui aliment şi extragerea substanţelor vitale organismului uman impun coborârea în intestin a două forţe superioare: sângele şi forţa nervoasă, tot aşa şi evoluţia omului necesită sacrificiul unor forţe superioare. De la această teză trebuie să pornim pentru a înţelege, în profunzime, sacrificiul propriului ego – ce are ca rezultat dobândirea statutului de *Om universal*. Islamul a dezvoltat ideea de „Om universal" (*el insânul kâmil*) pentru a cuprinde, într-o formă esenţializată, totalitatea trăsăturilor celui ce îşi depăşeşte propriul său *ego*.

De altfel, idealul „Omului desăvârşit" sau ideea de om perfect apare, din cele mai vechi timpuri, în toate culturile lumii: în Grecia antică, acest ideal era întruchipat fie de eroul capabil de a-şi depăşi condiţia de muritor (de exemplu, Herakles), fie de „iubitorul înţelepciunii" care devenea un înţelept (de exemplu, Socrate); în Kabbala ebraică există conceptul de „Om Primordial" (*Adam Kadmon*) sau „Om Suprem" (*Adam Elyon*); în China cel de „om veritabil" (*chenjen*), iar în India se vorbeşte, chiar şi în secolul al XXI-lea, despre „omul eliberat" (*jivan mukta*). Totuşi, (re)cunoaşterea acestui statut în deplinătatea posibilităţilor sale nu poate avea loc decât în urma unui război lăuntric.

Deşi numeroase mituri, legende şi basme cuprind referiri clare la un război lăuntric şi simbolic, în mentalul colectiv al umanităţii războiul este asociat, cel mai adesea, cu un mijloc violent pentru rezolvarea unui conflict exterior – acest tip de război pierzând, în cele din urmă, orice urmă de moralitate sau onoare. Totuşi, războiul limitat doar la o confruntare fizică cu efecte devastatoare asupra fizicului şi psihicului uman este, conform înţelepciunii orientale, doar „micul război" – care poate avea, cel mult, o legătură alegorică cu „marele război". Pentru a înţelege acest din urmă concept, este necesară o paralelă cu ceea ce în islam se numeşte *al-jihâd al-akbar*. Unul din poemele care prezintă foarte sugestiv tema anterioară este „Marele război" scris de Rūmī, din care redăm următoarele pasaje:

> Pe duşmanul de-afară noi l-am zvârlit în hău,
> în schimb în noi rămâne un duşman mult mai rău.
> Ca să-l ucizi pe-acesta n-ajunge-nţelepciune.
> Pe leul cel lăuntric nu-un iepure-l răpune.
> Vezi, iadul e-al tău suflet trupesc şi-a lui vâlvoare
> nu poate pe de-a-ntregul s-o stingă nici o mare.
> De-ar bea el şapte-oceane chiar dintr-o sorbitură
> şi nu i-ar scade pofta de-a arde-orice făptură.
> […]
> Prea ne-nsemnat e leul ce doar jivine-nvinge,
> căci leu e doar cel care pe sine se învinge. (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 187-188)

Spre deosebire de „*jihâd*-ul cel mic" (*al-jihâd al-asghar*, care reprezintă războiul exterior), „*jihâd*-ul cel mare" numeşte o bătălie interioară. Propriu-zis, cuvântul arab *jihâd* nu ar trebui să fie tradus ca „război", ci ca „(a face) efort" sau „a se strădui" (existând, în arabă, alte cuvinte care numesc conceptul de „război"). Echivalarea termenului de *jihâd* cu cel de „război sfânt" este, deci, improprie.

În tradiţia islamică abundă referirile la luptele interioare, pe care maeştrii sufi le descriu ca fiind purtate împotriva „sufletului carnal" (*an-nafs al-ammâra*). Aşadar, *al-jihâd al-akbar* numeşte efortul pe care cel ce decide să urmeze „Calea realizării spirituale" trebuie să îl facă pentru a-şi „ucide" propriile voinţe egoiste. În acest caz, victoria este obţinută doar dacă „luptătorul" obţine cunoaşterea de sine, depăşind graniţele egocentrismului. În mod inevitabil, perspectiva egoistă se extinde şi asupra lui Dumnezeu – astfel, omul priveşte divinitatea ca pe o realitate separată în mod categoric de propria fiinţă. Prin urmare, între om şi Dumnezeu se naşte o graniţă ce, pentru omul comun, pare de netrecut. Toate eforturile celui angajat în „războiul lăuntric" se canalizează spre destrămarea acestei graniţe; iar pentru a destrăma graniţa trebuie destrămată dualitatea (eu şi tu) şi realizată unitatea.

S-a pus întrebarea dacă există înţelegere în afara limbajului – iar misticii dovedesc că doar depăşind limitele convenţionale ale limbajului se naşte o profundă înţelegere: „Fiindcă numai limbajul simbolic îngăduie revelarea unei semnificaţii ascunse, percepute după măsura fiecăruia, care nu se poate exprima în nici un alt mod, numai el permite deschiderea către o realitate sesizată intuitiv, fără mişcare discursivă" (Vitray-Mayerovitch, 2003: 151). Acest tip de „limbaj" este, de fapt, o contemplaţie în timpul căreia raţiunile subiective dispar, fiind înlocuite, întotdeauna, de un anumit tip de inspiraţie:

> Atunci când drumeţu-al său drum şi l-a-mplinit,
> Vezi, punctul său din urmă cu primul s-a unit.
> El seamănă prea bine cu braţu-unui compas,
> ce pleacă iar din punctul din care-un cerc a tras.
> Şi când sfârşeşte drumul cel fără de prihană,
> pe creştet Domnu-i pune-a califului coroană.
> „Deci care e sfârşitul?" Celor ce-au întrebat,
> răspunsu-i: „A te-ntoarce de unde ai plecat" (*Poeme persane*, 2014: 263)

Pentru a-şi împlini drumul iniţiatic, dervişul nu mai rămâne un simplu *fakir*, ci devine un mistic („golit de propriul sine" şi „asemenea lui Dumnezeu") care înţelege din experienţă directă principiul similitudinii: „Aşadar, de nu eşti asemenea cu Zeul, nu îl poţi cunoaşte pe Zeu. Căci ceea ce este asemenea poate fi cunoscut [numai] de ceea ce este asemenea" (Hermes, 2015: 99). În lirica persană, este evidenţiat că un astfel de cunoscător devine, simultan, cunoaştere şi (cel) cunoscut. Asemenea flăcării, substanţa cunoaşterii mistuie graniţa dintre cunoscător şi cunoscut, iar din interacţiunea celor doi (deveniţi Unul) se naşte cunoaşterea pură.

În concluzie, moartea iniţiatică (a egoului) din versurile lui Rūmī şi Shabestarī apare ca fiind o reprezentare alegorică a împlinirii destinului creaţiei prin dobândirea cunoaşterii de sine ce face posibilă întoarcerea la Creator. Dervişul rătăcitor devine conştient de propriul exil în lume şi aspiră doar să revină la propriul „izvor". Din această perspectivă, iubirea e singurul motiv al inspiraţiei creatoare, divinul e singurul motiv al iubirii, iar „mistuirea" prin cunoaştere (*ma'rifah*) e singurul motiv al drumului iniţiatic.

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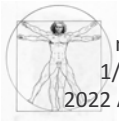

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The Two-Headed Monster in *Jane Eyre*: Anomalous Female Readership and Uncanny Intertextuality

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This paper approaches the manner in which Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, a parentless avid reader, comes into contact with parodies of the patriarchal Victorian family, where monstrous male figures exercise authority over female members of the household – the strange child, the vulnerable outcast, the lunatic. To explore the textual and social tensions the figure of the female reader as a threatening force produced in the nineteenth century, this paper focuses on a sagacious heroine civilizing a bestial hero representative of the fairy-tale genre. Though certainly ahistorical, Jane subverts the fairy-tale game of submission and dominance, inviting contemporary readers to see her as a participant in the construction of social meanings and challenge conflicting assumptions around her seemingly dark double and physical inferiority. Touching as it does on female experience within domesticity, this study submits findings consistent with the idea that the home – the *locus* of Victorian well-being – can easily adjoin a horrific Gothic site of incarceration and terror, populated by male tyrants and colonized monsters. For Jane Eyre and other reading heroines confined to such places as symbolic prisons or intellectual hospitals, books turn out to subsume plentiful underlying supplies of vitality.

Keywords

monstrosity; deformity; abnormal literacy practices; fairy-tales; Gothic sites; imprisonment; self-discovery.

Introduction

Despite being a novel that starts with "no possibility" (Brontë, 1847: 7), *Jane Eyre* is infused with images of the woman reader seen as a malformed creature frittering away her life in trivial textual pleasures, a monstrous female character trapped inside the claustrophobic confines of the domestic home, the Victorians' cornerstone of civilization; and fairy-tale references focusing on the development of the heroine, acquiring self-reliance in the process of taming a brutish man and growing fond of him. The very first sentence of the novel – "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (7) – prepares the reader for conflicting tensions between unpleasant outside forces and tranquil inner peregrinations, threatening impediments and soothing rescues, which generate and are generated out of psychological crises.

In the Victorian era, the solitude of women's reading acts was troublesome and appalling on many fronts. Paintings and written texts from the nineteenth century are illustrative of the visual and literary ways in which women readers and their reading practices were seen and represented as marketed public offerings. The aim was two-fold: to reflect nostalgia for a glorified middle-class past and to discourage women from reading (particularly novels), seen as diabolical practices. Antoine Wiertz's 1853 painting, *The Reader of Novels* captures a naked,

recumbent woman, holding a book above her head while others lie close by, and a mirror which prevents the male viewer's gaze, but positions her owner in boundless horizons of physical possibility. There is another, less visible detail lurking in the painting's background – a minuscule, devil-like face and a hand reaching for or perhaps, more plausibly, putting forth, seductively, one of the woman's tomes. The woman is alone, in a dark, secluded place, with curtains drawn to seal away any beam of light and possibility of mirror reflection – the implication being that the tranquil, hidden sanctuary of reading might allow monstrous forces to break into women's physical and mental nest.

Silently immersing in the pages of books meant, for the female reader, an intimately odd and atrocious relationship with the printed text. For modern readers, novels are, by definition, a whole body *rendez-vous*. Reading acts can use legs (to bounce them in excitement over characters' narrative milestones or to keep them crossed while hurrying though books at a sitting, for example), arms (fetching tales that submit one to one's imagination), hands, fingers, thumbs (to cling to favorite pages and search for answers to 'paranoid' questions in a Gilmanian way), mouths (to drop them open when surprised) and eyes (to scan pages while the readers' tongues hold still). Long before the nineteenth-century, reading out loud implied common reading efforts, intentional or not. In the nineteenth century, with silent reading, the reader was able to lay the foundations of an open, unconstrained (thus, abnormal) relationship with the text, which was no longer ventured into oral drills. As such, it could reside in the imagination, whether fully grasped or half-understood. The reader gained time to scrutinize longer passages at leisure and withdraw new, devilish messages from them. Under the watchful eyes of some dogmatists, silent reading raised anxieties about intemperate self-absorption, self-centeredness, day-dreaming induced by textual pleasure and, last but not least, the perils of acedia – the sin of idleness.

As if the insulting educational crumbs offered to young women (especially to provincial upper-middle-class and middle-class ladies, as working-class women were already enslaved to the contingencies of labor at home, at the shop or the factory and did not even dream of being the subject of the prevailing middle-class fascination with a domestic ideal) were not enough, opponents of women readers advanced a conviction consistent with the idea that women exhaust energy from their reproductive organs via brain work. This demolition of female reasoning faculties imperiling reproductive activity could easily be the subject of another study, given its enormous reverberation and ramification in fiction, medical studies, advice manuals, periodicals of the period and animal groom tales, as this paper will further demonstrate.

Anomalous female readership

Though women had taken great pains to demonstrate their abstract thinking abilities and to work unwaveringly, in the nineteenth-century, the virtually unanimous medical diagnosis that brain tension had critical repercussions on the female body – mutilated by treacherous reading forces – made a real difference to every careful parent who chose to impede their progeny from becoming dogmatic and presumptuous and, perhaps even more importantly, from letting their brain over-stimulation result in anemia, "stunted growth", hysteria, and in awful bodily conditions – being "more or less dwarfish specimens" and remaining "thin and scrawny" instead of transforming into the "rosy mother of a dozen healthy children" (Clouston, 1882: 38). The learned young woman granted access to a fair-sized book collection would inevitably be the subject of nervousness, characterized largely by "ungrounded fears", "deficient power of self-control", "over sensitiveness in all directions", of "the inflammation of

the brain" (40-2), eventual insanity and very great many repellent over-study symptoms. Unfortunately, such writers' agonized plea for women's salvation by preventing learning, postponing it or averting it altogether was uppermost even in the minds of twentieth-century biologists such as the Scottish Thomson and Geddes, as well, in their 1912 tract entitled *Problems of Sex*. Thomson and Geddes fiercely warn that women cramming over books "have highly developed brains" and their argument climaxes in a dreadful vision of women's morbid love of learning that determines most of them to "die young" (Thomson & Geddes, 1912: 27). Their vocation, thus, like that of most contemporary emancipated women was "rather a temporal than a spiritual one" (27). The authors mockingly remind their readers to acknowledge the fact that "each [woman] carries her poisoned sting — no new and strange weapon, but part of the very organ of maternity, the ovipositor, the egg-placer, with which the queen lays each egg in its appointed cell" (27). Thus, reading's poisonous effects are carried away generation after generation by such "queens", imparting to the infant frailties and birth defects. It goes without saying that a woman's entry into the workforce and higher education (conventionally male public spheres) incarnated a social and organic anomaly. In a host of social and ideological contexts that believed in the treatment of "nervous exhaustion" by disapproving all social activity, the most cited solution to the anomaly was the rest cure, which was not defied by a recalcitrant historical public, but remained endemic to nineteenth-century medical models.

Early Victorians' ideas of human physiology often involved a hazy knowledge of biochemistry and endocrinology. The accepted parameters of the female body were fraught with the assumption that women were tinier, inner-oriented versions of men (that is, women were susceptible to internal stimuli rather than external). As their bodies were labelled as sealed, finite systems of energy, physical, mental and reproductive expenditure were considered to be in intense rivalry, hence the idea that female reproductive efficiency was put in jeopardy by intellectual toil. For this reason, too, there must have evolved the Victorian all too good remedy for any predicament – rest. Towards the end of the century, a new understanding of biology began to hold allure, paving the way to new technological developments (specialized surgical instruments and diagnosis techniques) and alternative therapies. A sought-after practice was that of phrenology, which insisted on the recognition of temperamental features (such as anger and lust) guided by lumps and bumps on an individual's skull, along with facial characteristics. Only in 1846 was the term 'psychiatry' introduced to stand for the medical care of the mentally-handicapped (with mental diseases treated as having hereditary roots). This inefficient treatment of both body and mind affected particularly female patients, whose feminine trait scarcity was tautologically viewed as a tie-in to madness provoked by over-exposure to intellectual study (or neurasthenia to the educated classes).

In the many non-literary writings about impressionable young women of the period – medical and evolutionary treaties on women's transforming anatomy – the authors (in agreement with an entire "milieu" of the Victorian mind) seemed to concede that girls reaching the age of adolescence possessed inflamed sensations converting and corrupting any pristine reader into a monstrously fallen creature (and novels, in this context, stayed tied to desire and amorous intrigues and submitted its readers to the erotic). Around this dangerous textual experience there evolved both a rhetoric and a policy of surveillance. Parents had the duty to unmask this grotesque process and supervise their children, by keeping their subjectivity within bounds. Thus, the girl (of superior social station, as might be expected) vulnerable to excitement and over-identification with texts was kept away from distractions and forced a

taste for classical literature, history and some forms of poetry until she attained the presumed security of marriage.

Every page of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) – published under the male pseudonym of Currer Bell – burns with the question of literacy acquisition and the heroine's dangerous reading encounters with secular and religious texts, constantly pushing against the limits of patriarchy and traditional cultural values. Throughout her story, Jane engages in furtive, solitary, unconventional reading practices with the aristocracy of the mind presuming a concealed meaning in the didactic secrets of texts. Analogously, the modern reader experiences the female character's childhood flashbacks and subsequent use of education while participating, to some degree, in the secrecy of Brontë's parabolic narration. The modern reader becomes imaginatively involved in picturing the concealed reading corner of Gateshead Hall, taking an intermediate stance towards Brocklehurst's fiendish abuse or interacting with Helen Burns and Maria Temple intellectually.

Menacing white, middle-class monsters (the Reed children) break into Jane Eyre's mental nest, make goofy faces at her, stop her from reading and beat her. These budding problems flower as the novel goes on. Reverend Brocklehurst – described as a "black pillar" (Brontë, 1847: 31), a totem pole rather than a human creature, constantly censors Jane's reading. His monopoly on Bible interpretation will be, unfortunately, repeated time and again during Jane's stay at Lowood. The different responses to sacred texts in *Jane Eyre*, however, echo the significance of the Bible, in the nineteenth-century (although not restricted to this period), as the most powerful catalyst to reading in Protestant Europe and America. A particularly repugnant effect is achieved by yet another member of the clergy, St. John Rivers, who is a "cold cumbrous column" (389), enforcing his strict doctrinal views on Jane's reading of the Bible. The novel, however, through innovative novelistic manipulations, manages to assert Jane's religious freedom and self-determining nature in the denouement. The biblical orientation towards "the *eschaton*, or end times, is reversed", while the narrative and imagery of the Eden myth takes on an "altered significance" (Jenkins, 1993: 71-72). The marriage that concludes the novel is depicted as a relationship of equality (by this point, the protagonist is financially independent via inherited wealth).

Jane, imprisoned as a child in the Red Room, is reminiscent, in many ways, of Anne Radcliffe's Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Like Emily, Jane experiences terror and thinks "that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated [her] kindly" (16) while a beam of light ushers in "some coming vision from another world" (17), echoing in the narrative another ghostly apparition – the incarcerated Bertha. The "monster" in the attic, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, is, at first sight, the Caribbean figure whose destructive violence, sexual passion run riot, psychological primitiveness and lack of mercy and fear sabotage the courtship plot in *Jane Eyre*. Monsters are, in fact, "creatures who scare because they look different, wrong, non-human" (Moers, 1976: 101) and give "*visual* form to the fear of self (107). The heroine, a pure young woman without family or social status, is shown to be trapped in a hostile environment, which will later bring to the surface the mystery of the dark, Byronic hero Rochester married to a lunatic Jamaican wife, evil and violent, lascivious and inchoative, identified by critics as Jane's "truest and darkest double" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000: 360), who dies a violent death which figuratively and literally allows Jane and Rochester to reunite in a happy (yet ambivalent) ending. Before returning Jane to Rochester, Brontë shows the heroine departing from Thornfield Hall, "before she too becomes helplessly, hopelessly mad" (Modleski, 1990: 73), as Gothic heroines often do to repudiate the paranoid process, and

switching from submission to aggression. Aggression and estrangement, however, to a compliant individual like Jane, indicate that "human relationships are disturbed" and make her "verge on the ascetic" (Horney, 1945: 74-84). The way the novel achieves closure does not confirm the idea that the relationship between men and women (in the novel and, by extension, in the larger context of the nineteenth century) has ceased to be troublesome.

Uncanny intertextuality

The pictorial prelude to the novel's pre-adolescent reading experience, filled with solitary birds haunting "forlorn regions of dreary space" (Brontë, 1847: 8), rocky promontories, marine phantoms and fiends is graphically introduced by the book-to-window motif. The non-linear plot of Jane Eyre is jump-started by the non-fiction work of Thomas Bewick, *A History of the British Birds* (1797, 1804), sinking and transposing the modern reader further and further into the past. Jane transmogrifies into a confident make-believe player in a vignette world retaining unconventional Edenic features, brimmed with death-white realms, bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland and Greenland, rocks found unescorted in a sea of billow and spray and unaccompanied disintegrated boats abandoned on a secluded shore, in forms that the child gradually learns to shed light on and control. There are two common threads reminiscent of Jane's real experience running along the adopted non-fictional text: (1) secrecy and concealment and (2) the unavoidable danger lurking in the background that besets the reader. As a poverty-stricken orphan living in the house of her malicious and well-to-do relatives, Jane Eyre is a solitary character. The cruelly monstrous Reed children and Aunt Reed regard little Jane – who ought to know better than to "rummage [their] book-shelves" (Brontë, 1847: 11) – with patronizing contempt, echoing the long line of critics constantly assaulting Victorian women's minds for daring to consult a father or a relative's library, the British Museum, the lending library or a room of one's own as a site of agency from where one prizes out intellectual power.

For Jane, reading is extended beyond childhood play (although childhood play in Freudian terms does allow Jane to indulge in fostering fantasies enabling her to build up a credible imaginary world and derive pleasure from it), presenting the case for a *rite of passage* – in contrast to tribal rituals – that is private rather than public, discrete rather than communal, and carried out in secrecy, without the knowledge or consent of the Reeds, camouflaged by the curtained alcove where Jane retreats to examine the pictorial charm of her book. In conformity with Arnold van Gennep's view of the loss of childhood and transgression into a state of undifferentiation in his *The Rites of Passage*, Jane's "negative rite" (1960: 8) is set into motion by John Reed and it entails violence (most rites of passage do, as Arnold van Gennep explains, when the child is separated from society and deprived of his name, his family or his ancestral history) exerted by someone in a position of power (e.g., a demon, a deity, a group of jinn) who intervenes to carry on the ritual. In this regard, Jane's ominous rite of passage is, at its heart, both a rite of separation and one of transition – a separation from her well-to-do kin and a transition into forced maturity of thought.

As in Arnold's van Gennep's stories of children terrifyingly secluded from society and constrained to reside in a far-out group where anonymity and cruelty prevail, Jane is forced to suffer once more at the hands of Rev. Brocklehurst, at Lowood, and to be on the move, from that moment on, continuously. Along the way, she is also comforted, however, by guardian, nurturing figures – Bessie, Miss Temple and Helen Burns. For the reading character, this ritual transaction begins with a sharp confiscation of personal identity brought about from

orphanhood and access to an adoptive family. She clandestinely turns to books and reading returns to her what she had lost during the enforced rites of separation and transition: in books, she hunts for her roots, family history, and vocation.

In the first chapter of the book, another literary allusion splits the imaginary world of Jane Eyre into figures of absolute good and evil, in a Manichaean manner – Goldsmith's *History of Rome* (one of the common titles that could be found in a young Victorian's library, along with moral tales meant for the edification of children). Little Jane uses books as a prop for solitude. They represent the visceral energy governing Jane's emotional economy. Domestic tyrants disguised as family members make books their proxy for those under their control. Jane dreads the intrusion of such outsiders in her secluded place. These opening pages of Brontë's novel form the picture of a strong-willed young reader, fighting monsters in the family library, ruthlessly honest in her unsuppressed objection of injustice, with the intellectual vigor of an adult. Wounded, she faces John Reed: "You are like a murderer – you are like a slave-driver – you are like the Roman emperors!" (1847: 11). If one could equate words to weapons and ammunition, little Jane would undoubtedly win the battle with John Reed. Unlike Bessie's tales and ballads, Goldsmith's *History of Rome* (1774) is, in substance, a book explicitly concerned with manliness. Goldsmith's ancient world, with its grandeur and solemnity, involving Nero and Caligula, two mad emperors commonly known for their barbarism, captivates the young Jane Eyre, who is definitely not a typical reader for her age. The patriarchal John Reed is firm about the book being his, and shows no remorse for hurling it at Jane, stonewalling her attempts at a logic response. The Reeds' book stands here for masculine weaponry, because it encloses within its pages historical and policy-making knowledge conventionally made available to a male-readership. From Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, Jane gleans knowledge about male acts of despotism intended for vulnerable, lower reaches (women, children, the impoverished).

The Reeds are described as discriminatory and unreasonable, and, as many critics have suggested, the adoptive family is, in many ways, a caricature of the Victorian family in which the male exercises domineering control over his passive, vulnerable feme covert. She stands in sharp opposition to the Reeds even by means of her patronymic, for "*Eyre* is a curious riddle-like name, suggesting multiple meanings" (Peterson, 1944: 86). Indeed, on phonetic grounds, *Eyre* jogs the attentive reader's memory and recalls lexical items such as *air* (prompting one to take into account Jane's apparent immateriality), *eerie* (hinting to Jane's awareness of herself and her surroundings as foreign, unfamiliar) or even *heir* (a sarcastic remark about her lack of heritage) and *ire* (for the exasperation and indignation that have reached a boiling point and Jane is no longer withholding them). On etymological grounds, *Eyre* sparks other meaningful connections to *journey* (as derived from the Old French verb *erre*), suggesting that Jane is a forlorn nomad, *eyrie* as a variant of *aerie* (the bird nest of big bird, with the logic implication, again, of vagrancy) and *eyra* (which also designates a "wild cat" (87)), which is the appellation John Reed uses at the very start of Chapter 2 when Jane began to challenge his authority: "Hold her arms, Miss Abbot: she's like a mad cat" (Brontë, 1847: 12).

In order to compensate for the regulations of the censorship exerted on her, Jane finds a way to evade the censor while playing by the censor's rule. Authoritarian political systems usually use provocation – just as John Reed did – to determine the oppressed nonconformists to manifest themselves plainly. Books in the Victorian age were, as the previous section showed, a primary tool in the elaboration, gendering, and policing of bourgeois subjectivity. In the informing context of the Jane Eyre versus John Reed scene, it is obvious why novels and novel-reading were so often viewed as prompting subversive action on the part of the reader

sensitive to nuances of veiled secrecy and concealment of meanings. Virtually all classic texts, from Homer to Joyce, embed such threatening secrecy excluding contentious outsiders and sharing didactic secrets to neophytes. Another powerful implication of the textual concealment behind which rests the ultimate buried truth of experience is self-instruction for a reader like Jane. All the textual enigmas and *mises en abyme* Jane immerses herself in (some left embedded in the matrix of intertexts, some eerily scratching the surface and some never fully resolved) are an extraordinary *tour de force* – they provide in her the need to figure out what is going on structurally in a piece of writing and, thus, they ensure reading as the inner autobiography of the female character. Perhaps just as importantly, notions of the uncanny, along with furtive reading, secrecy, pleasure and enigma come very close to each other and enable Jane to recognize the hidden meaning of other texts read in adulthood.

Reading and rereading also take place off-stage, when Jane temporarily shies away from the reader's attention:

> Bessie asked if I would have a book – the word book acted as a transient stimulus and I begged her to fetch Gulliver's Travels from the library. This book I had again and again perused with delight; I considered it a narrative of facts, and discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than what I found in fairy tale: for as to the elves, having sough them in vain. (…) I had at length made up my mind to the sad truth, that they were all gone out of England to some savage country (…) whereas Lilliput and Brobdingnag being, in my creed, solid parts of the earth's surface, I doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see with my own eyes the little fields, houses, and trees, the diminutive people, the tiny cows, sheep, and birds of the one realm; and (…) the towerlike men and women, on the other. (21)

When the mature Jane returns to Gateshead at Aunt Reed's deathbed, she immediately recognizes the books which have witnessed her despair as a child – Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver Travels* (1726) and the collection of folk tales *The Arabian Nights*, read after she first met Mr. Brocklehurst. These volumes had, in fact, immortalized her terror in the Red Room. *Gulliver's Travels* – a tale seen as a narrative of facts, comprising non-human creatures (pigmies, giants, and chattering horses) – seems a healthy choice for a ten-year-old's unsophisticated literary sensibility. The formerly delightful imaginary world of Lilliput and Brobdingnag has now, in retrospective, become horrendous to the grown-up Jane. Even to the young female character, whose reader-response was inevitably shaped by her physical and social space, Gulliver seemed "a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous units" (21). Most children of her age regard Gulliver as a gleeful adventurer. Not Jane, however. She is able to see both good and evil in adventure stories, thus revealing her active reading processes from an early age. The incoherent world where Gulliver lands is, by extension, Jane's own inhospitable environment. Critics have pointed to Jane's propensity – as an orphan – towards identifying herself with the miniature Lilliputians as a reflection of her own feelings of diminution and hostile figures in her life (Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed) – "looming adult persecutors" (Rowe, 1983: 74) – with the imposing Brobdingnagian giants. While the fearsome Brocklehurst is looking down on Jane, his physical traits borrow the features of the threatening wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*, one of the popular tales girls of the period were familiar with (in fact, Jane's early literary sensibility was largely tutored by Bessie's folktales, including those hinted at later, Thornfield-related pointers to *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Snow-Drop*, *The Blue-Bird*, recounting a heroine's

attempt to escape danger and evil creatures). Jane's myopic description of Mr. Brocklehurst is revelatory in this regard: "What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!" (Brontë, 1847: 32). Size distortion, here, subsumes intertextual references to fairy tales into Jane's rhetoric.

For a broadly curious and open-minded reader like Jane Eyre, romances can be put under the weight of critical scrutiny and interpreted using the satirist's tool, while religious literature may be patterned after secular stories. The fairy-tale motifs scattered across the novel – there is a cruel stepmother as in *Cinderella* or *Snow-Drop* and stepsisters with spoon-fed personalities, Thornfield Hall is associated with Bluebeard's castle, the bedsteads Jane discovers upon arrival at Thornfield seem to be a century-old, Rochester is in the secret possession of a shadowy, undisclosed room hiding a "monster", Rochester takes up the role of the ugly Beast, while Jane is his Beauty – are shifted and reinterpreted to show that many of their romance-charged plots subsume painful, cynical realities which cannot be ignored. Jane Eyre ventures into a constant reworking of literary motifs, culminating with the idea that the Victorians should rethink nouveau riches-inspired educational paradigms (the drawbacks of the curriculum are explicitly made available by Georgiana Reed who indulges in amorous intrigues and is educated for the marriage market, Eliza Reed whose daily routine is extracted from the conduct books of the age and Blanche Ingram, educated according to the requirements of the fashionable curriculum, standing in sharp contrast to the genuine gentlewoman, Jane. Rather than expecting childhood readings and fairy-tale plots to build a replica in her life, Jane Eyre lets their imaginative playfulness rest between what has been read and what remains to be read.

Viewing *Jane Eyre* through the tenebrous lens of animal groom tales is especially useful in analyzing the female protagonist's transformation from a suffering, "uncongenial alien", an "interloper not of [the Reed's] race" (16) into the mature wife who achieves a "perfect concord" with her blind husband at the end of the novel. Most animal groom tales share some common denominators – the heroine is forced to live with a dreary animal or a beastly man in a gloomy castle (or another darkly archaic setting reminiscent of Thornfield Hall). The heroine progressively learns to love the monster and acknowledges she is besotted with him after an eventual disentanglement proves devastating for one of them. It is usually the heroine's good nature and devotion that trigger a change for the better in the animal groom, with the usual implication that the young female's perception of the beast has changed, not the beast *per se*. Jane takes on the challenge of transforming the "beast" into a human: "It is time some one undertook to *rehumanise* you, … for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort" (432, my emphasis). The Beast of the animal groom tale asks Beauty – "tell me, do not you think me very ugly?" (Opie & Opie, 1974: 144). Like the Beast, Rochester interrogates Jane, "Am I hideous, Jane?". Jane's riposte reads "Very, sir: you always were, you know" (434), recalling Beauty's response - she does not deny his deformity though she acknowledges his good nature. Such aspects parallel important plot developments in *Jane Eyre* and the changing nature of the relationship between Jane Eyre (civilizing the seemingly repugnant "beast") and the tamed Edward Rochester (winning the heroine's heart), forced to confront his own odiousness, as Jane acquires psychological and emotional maturity. Bruno Bettelheim explains, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, that in *Beauty and the Beast*, "it is not just the growth of Beauty's love for the Beast, or even her transferring her love for her father to the Beast" which is at the core of the tale, but "her own growth in the process" (Bettelheim, 1976: 308), thus confirming Jane's journey towards selfhood, which is hardly surprising in an "autobiographical" novel, as indicated by the "mediator" in *Jane Eyre*, Currer Bell, ready to

vouch for the authenticity of the printed text presented to the public. The same human/non-human clash is made available by another intertext, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), which traces the protagonist's travel from one place of imprisonment to another. Like Jane at Ferndean, Gulliver completes the last stage of his journey when he meets the Yahoos (living in the topsy-turvy land of civilized and wise horses, the Huyhnhnms), repellent brutes used as work animals. Gulliver soon starts to grow fond of the Huyhnhnms and hesitant concerning the men's flaws.

Conclusions

How could Victorian critics understand the new *modus legendi* of fictional young readers such as Jane Eyre, who takes up reading as a solitary, banned activity, when their ancestors had only been familiar with few collectively readable texts, such as the Bible? Jane Eyre's reading acts include a visceral relationship with the book that is more profound and sensitive to concealed meanings than in traditional, men-dominated approaches to reading, which breed monsters. The book is constantly handled, tousled, bent, forced in changing directions and carried along with the reader in *privacy* – privacy as the origin of, I dare say, creative imagination. It is this creative imagination, which hurls defiance at monsters in human form – the monster of forbidden education and freedom of thought (embodied by the Reeds, Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers), the monster of passion (Bertha) and the monster of irresistible temptation (Rochester). The reader's privacy carries the main implication that the intimacy between *secret* reading and texts read *privately* as a form of social reticence can always be disclosed, made public, grotesquely divulged, guessed or freely discovered by those whom it is intended to leave behind. The global conclusion I could draw, after unveiling the monstrous patterns brought about by literacy practices and themes and meanings from animal groom tales in *Jane Eyre* is that, when female characters are the "muted" group, constantly associated with atrocity and deformity, they find it difficult to explore and withdraw from texts their genuine needs and sensibilities. The previous sections have shown, however, the female protagonist passing "the major test of reading" – humanizing the "Beast", questioning conventional beliefs and, ultimately, deciding how and with whom to spend her life.

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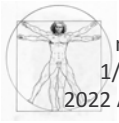

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Lo monstruoso en cuatro novelas del siglo XIX

Monstrosity in Four Nineteenth-Century Novels

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En este artículo analizaremos la concepción de lo monstruoso en cuatro textos literarios del siglo XIX pertenecientes a la literatura inglesa, destacando los elementos comunes de la visión del monstruo en ellos y aquellos que los separan, basados en la idiosincrasia de la época en que fueron publicados y en el contexto particular de los narradores. Las obras objeto de nuestro estudio son *Frankenstein o El moderno Prometeo* de Mary Shelley (1818), *El extraño caso del Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde* de R.L. Stevenson (1886), *El retrato de Dorian Gray* de Oscar Wilde (1890) y *Drácula* de Bram Stoker (1897). Comenzaremos realizando un acercamiento a la concepción de lo monstruoso en las cuatro novelas, para incidir a continuación en el cronotopo, los atributos del monstruo y los elementos míticos y simbólicos de las novelas. Nuestra intención es destacar las similitudes y diferencias entre ellas y la evolución del monstruo desde las teorías científicas que inspiraron la novela gótica *Frankenstein*, pasando por la dualidad del ser humano en Jekyll y Hyde y Dorian Gray, para finalizar con la creación de otro de los mitos esenciales de la literatura y la cultura modernas, el vampiro.

Palabras clave

monstruoso; Drácula; Frankenstein; Jekyll y Hyde; Dorian Gray; novela del siglo XIX.

In this article we will analyze the conception of the monstrous in four nineteenth-century literary texts belonging to English literature, highlighting the common and different aspects on the vision of the monster, based on the idiosyncrasies of the period in which they were published, and on the narrators' particular context. The works under study are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), R.L. Stevenson's, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).We will begin with an approach to the conception of the monstrous in the four novels, and then focus on the chronotope, the attributes of the monster and the mythical and symbolic elements of the novels. Our intention is to highlight the similarities and differences between them and the evolution of the monster from the scientific theories that inspired the gothic novel Frankenstein, through the duality of the human being in Jekyll and Hyde and Dorian Gray, to end with the creation of another of the essential myths of modern literature and culture, the vampire.

Keywords

monstrous; Dracula; Frankenstein; Jekyll and Hyde; Dorian Gray; 19th century novel.

Concepción de lo monstruoso

Comenzaremos por definir la palabra *monstruo*, que procede del latín *monstrum* y es definida en el diccionario como ser que presenta desviaciones respecto a su especie, ser fantástico que causa espanto por su fealdad, perversidad o crueldad o aquel ser que excede las cualidades y aptitudes comunes.

Todos estos rasgos se manifiestan en los personajes monstruosos de los textos citados, especialmente en la criatura de Víctor Frankenstein, que se caracteriza por su fuerza y tamaño descomunal, hasta el punto de que su creador siente pavor ante ella: "incapaz de soportar la visión del ser que había creado […] vi al engendro, al monstruo miserable que había creado" (Shelley, 1996: 170). La fuerza sobrenatural de la criatura se subraya en varios pasajes del libro.

Además, la identidad del monstruo no puede ser definida, por estar conformada mediante fragmentos, al igual que criaturas como los sátiros o la esfinge. Lo fragmentario se relaciona con el gusto por las ruinas y lo onírico propios de la estética romántica. De la misma manera, en la época romántica se empieza a destacar como rasgo de la modernidad la escisión del sujeto, tema esencial de los textos de Stevenson y Oscar Wilde.

El monstruo nace al margen de la naturaleza y la cultura, hecho ya presente en Frankenstein y que alcanza su momento álgido en Drácula: el conde, al igual que la criatura de Víctor, es un ser único, sin precedente ni continuación. No posee familia ni raigambre alguna y tampoco la posibilidad de integrarse en sociedad ni mundo concretos. El conde vive aferrado a su pasado glorioso a sabiendas de que nunca volverá, y la criatura de Víctor Frankenstein solo posee un creador al que sin embargo inspira únicamente repulsión y rechazo.

Además, el monstruo no posee distinción de género. El experimento de Víctor es un ser masculino pero sin posibilidad de tener compañera alguna ni de procreación, de hecho en el libro el matrimonio de Víctor con Elizabeth ni siquiera se consuma.

Frente a la novela de Mary Shelley, en los otros textos el monstruo se asocia a las pulsiones sexuales, de índole explícitamente homosexual en el caso de Dorian Gray y ajenas a las reglas del cortejo o primitivas en *Drácula*.

El vampiro por otra parte no es ni femenino ni masculino, es una representación del "hyperbolic gender" y de la liberación sexual y ausencia de represión: "the vampire is an incarnation of the pleasure principle running uncontrolled" (Weinstock, 2012: 22 *apud* Triguero Fernández, 2018: 4).

Podemos afirmar que en la concepción de lo monstruoso los experimentos científicos presentes en la novela de Mary Shelley (el galvanismo y las teorías sobre la reanimación) dan paso a la perplejidad y la inquietud, anticipando ya los textos literarios del siglo XX, en los que lo fantástico se inscribe en la realidad y forma parte del hombre. En este sentido en Jekyll y Hyde se introduce como elemento novedoso la experimentación de un científico consigo mismo.

Un cronotopo en los límites de la realidad. Lo natural y la ciencia

La filiación genérica de las novelas analizadas se relaciona con la literatura gótica, fantástica o de terror, que sitúan la acción en los límites del mundo. El texto de Mary Shelley se inicia en los confines de la tierra, a través de las cartas del explorador Robert Walton, viajero que escribe desde una tierra no hollada por el ser humano, indómita, donde se encuentra con Víctor. De igual manera, cuando este narra el proceso de creación durante varios años y alimentado por las teorías científicas de la Universidad de Ingolstadt, lo hace en total aislamiento y posteriormente elegirá las islas Orcadas para diseñar la idea de una compañera

para el monstruo. Además, el primer encuentro entre creador y criatura se produce en los Alpes, y esta escena va precedida de una descripción de la cima de Montanvert, donde Víctor, solo y extasiado en esa naturaleza majestuosa, recibe por primera vez la visita del monstruo. También el final de la novela vuelve a esa naturaleza fuera de los límites geográficos de cualquier mundo conocido.

En *Drácula* sucede lo mismo, ya desde el comienzo del libro el protagonista relata su incursión en las tierras del conde como un internamiento en un territorio desconocido que, como sucede en los textos del género fantástico, rompe los límites del mundo conocido y desestabiliza la realidad: "Era evidente que sucedía o se esperaba que sucediera algo muy emocionante. Vimos por fin abrirse ante nosotros el desfiladero en su parte oriental. Había en lo alto nubes oscuras, encrespadas, y el aire estaba cargado de la sensación pesada, opresiva, de los truenos" (Stoker, 2022: 16).

Aunque los escenarios del texto de Stevenson y Oscar Wilde no remiten directamente a esos paisajes recónditos, en ambos lo monstruoso se sitúa en espacios ocultos de la casa. Así, Jekyll se convierte en Hyde en la parte trasera de la morada. De la misma manera, el retrato de Dorian, reflejo de su alma amoral y depravada, se encuentra escondido y no visible, en lo más alto de su vivienda. En este sentido las dos novelas más centradas en la dualidad del ser humano, como son ambos textos, sitúan el escenario del monstruo dentro de la misma casa, mientras que en *Frankenstein* y *Drácula*, donde las criaturas tienen entidad propia, el monstruo nace, vive y se extingue en una naturaleza acorde al pensamiento romántico panteísta. No en vano la novela de Bram Stoker se ha relacionado con los rasgos del llamado "Romanticismo oscuro", presente en textos de terror como los relatos de Edgar Allan Poe.

Hemos de señalar también la peculiaridad de *El retrato de Dorian Gray* en cuanto al espacio, fruto de la corriente estética característica de Oscar Wilde, el decadentismo, cuya esencia en cuanto a la ambientación es la recreación de un mundo refinado y elegante en vías de extinción. Como ejemplo, citaremos el comienzo de la novela: "En el estudio había un fragante olor a rosas, y cuando el ligero vientecillo de verano que pasaba entre los árboles del jardín penetró a través de la ventana abierta, trajo con él un aroma de lilas y un delicado perfume de flores de cardo" (2009: 27).

También responde esta novela al esteticismo y su idea del arte por el arte, como se observa en varios pasajes del libro a través del pintor Basil: "Él define para mí las líneas de un nuevo estilo, un estilo que puede expresar toda la pasión del espíritu romántico, toda la perfección del espíritu griego. La armonía entre el alma y el cuerpo" (36).

El monstruo en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones se asocia en los textos comentados a la noche. En *Frankenstein* el momento en que Víctor ve a su criatura por vez primera se enmarca así: "Una desapacible noche de noviembre contemplé el final de mis esfuerzos […]. Era ya la una de la madrugada; la lluvia golpeaba las ventanas sombríamente, y la vela casi ya se había consumido, cuando, a la mortecina luz de la llama, vi cómo la criatura abría sus ojos amarillentos y apagados" (Shelley, 1996: 169). No olvidemos que en el prólogo de la obra la autora señala el origen de la novela en el verano de 1816 (el llamado "estío sin luz" debido a la erupción del monte Tambora) cuando pasó el verano en la casa ginebrina de lord Byron. Por las noches, agrupados en torno a la chimenea, los allí reunidos se propusieron escribir relatos de fantasmas.

Por su parte, el monstruo en que se convierte Jekyll actúa de noche, aludiendo así al lado oscuro de la personalidad humana. Su morada es misteriosa y está en la parte trasera de la casa. De la misma manera, el espejo de Dorian Gray se sitúa como hemos mencionado

anteriormente en lo más recóndito de la vivienda, bajo llave, de manera que "nadie podría verlo. Ni siquiera él mismo lo vería" (Wilde, 2009: 148).

También el conde Drácula es un "hijo de la noche". Muchos pasajes de la novela transcurren en la oscuridad: la estancia en el castillo, el intento de mordedura de las mujeres, la fuga de Jonathan Harker, así como los pasajes de la novela desarrollados ya en Inglaterra, la tormenta, el ataque a Mina. Finalmente, también el desenlace y persecución del conde tienen una ambientación nocturna.

Lo monstruoso pertenece además al espacio de la irrealidad o la irrupción de lo sobrenatural, lo primitivo y las pulsiones más ancestrales en lo cotidiano, acercándose a la concepción del marco espacial del fantástico. Por ello en las cuatro novelas permanece la idea de los monstruos como representantes "de ese mundo tras la frontera de lo real". El personaje de Drácula es quien mejor materializa esa ambigüedad inherente al no-muerto que ha sido humano y "no deja de mostrarse con una monstruosidad ambigua, ya que siempre se percibe como mitad hombre, mitad monstruo" (Pujante, 2019: 171).

Mary Shelley construye su relato partiendo de las investigaciones científicas del siglo XIX, puesto que Víctor Frankenstein crea vida basándose en las teorías del galvanismo, consistente en la reanimación de cadáveres mediante impulsos eléctricos. Por ello *Frankenstein* se acerca al género de la ciencia-ficción más que a la novela gótica. En el prólogo de la primera edición de la obra, en 1818, la autora apunta la posibilidad de que los hechos de su narración tengan una base científica.

De igual manera, el protagonista de Jekyll y Hyde es un científico (como Víctor). Concretamente, Hyde es la creación de una obsesión científica. Las notas del doctor revelan que la droga es una forma de disparar la realidad inherente al ser humano (Ortiz Trueba, 2016).

El monstruo como anomalía, la muerte como solución

El monstruo simboliza el rechazo y transgresión de la norma, a nivel físico, biológico y moral: "nos pone en contacto con el lado oscuro del ser humano al reflejar nuestros deseos más ocultos" (Roas, 2019: 30). Lo monstruoso es una amenaza para el hombre, un elemento imposible de naturaleza ambigua que irrumpe en la realidad y desestabiliza los cimientos de la misma.

En *Frankenstein* todos los personajes se ven diferentes a la sociedad en la que viven. Robert Walton es un explorador que se dirige en soledad a los confines del mundo. En las tierras inexploradas del Norte ve primero al monstruo y después a su creador, quien le cuenta su historia y el proceso de creación. Víctor transgrede las normas de la naturaleza y de la sociedad, es incapaz de crear una familia y tanto él como su *alter ego*, la criatura, siembran la destrucción por donde van.

En varios pasajes de esta novela se destaca el carácter sobrenatural del monstruo, su condición de ser anómalo incapaz de ser aceptado a no ser por un invidente, como sucede en su primer contacto con la familia. A medida que transcurre la trama y cuando se invierten los papeles y es él quien persigue a Víctor se insiste en esta condición de ser anómalo: "¿Quién puede perseguir a un animal capaz de atravesar el mar de hielo, habitar en grutas y cavernas, donde ser humano jamás osaría entrar?"(Shelley, 1996: 323).

Los testigos que ven a Hyde en el texto de Stevenson insisten en la deformidad y en su condición de ser infrahumano: "debe de tener alguna deformidad. En su aspecto hay algo equívoco, desagradable, decididamente detestable. Nunca he visto a nadie despertar tanta repugnancia. Su aspecto es realmente extraordinario" (1999: 16).

En *El retrato de Dorian Gray* la anomalía no es física, sino moral, pues Dorian no tiene aberraciones físicas, de modo que su monstruosidad obedece a una manifestación interior, es un individuo ajeno a las reglas. Así, el monstruo que anida en su alma lo lleva a mirar el mundo con cinismo. Su mirada no es la de los otros y ello lo convierte en un enajenado.

Existe una conexión entre la novela de Wilde y la de Stevenson, puesto que Dorian "es un Je[c]kyll y Hyde, incapaz de establecer la separación entre ambos, si no es a partir de la apariencia, que se construye para sí y para los demás" (Alvarado Vega, 2018: 125).

De todos los monstruos analizados en este artículo Drácula es el más alejado de la sociedad que lo rodea, la Inglaterra de la época victoriana. Es una criatura transgresora, cuyas raíces se remontan a tribus arcaicas y sangrientas. Se constituye en la antítesis de la humanidad, y por ello para restaurar el orden y la civilización debe ser erradicado. El holandés Van Helsing será el arma principal para derrotarlo. Drácula es "a monstrous trespasser born in a distant past and land who had hitherto remained dormant in isolation from the civilized world" (Ortiz Trueba, 2016: 17).

Si el monstruo es una anomalía, su exterminación es la única solución para el restablecimiento del orden. En las cartas que cierran la novela de *Frankenstein,* el viajero Walton asiste a la muerte de Víctor y a la desolación del monstruo al contemplar la desaparición de su padre, de su creador. Por ello afirma: "ha muerto aquel que me creó, y cuando yo deje de existir, el recuerdo de ambos desaparecerá pronto" (Shelley, 1996: 344). Decidido a inmolarse, se aleja y se pierde fundiéndose con la naturaleza.

En la novela de *El Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde* la única solución para Jekyll es la muerte de su otra mitad, quitarse la vida para destruir la parte primitiva e inconsciente que cada vez se apodera más de él suplantando su identidad. En el relato final donde Jekyll cuenta su vida sabemos que su suicidio fue un desesperado intento de aniquilar al monstruo que anidaba en él y era su dueño: "Ésta es, en verdad, la hora de mi muerte, y lo que de ahora en adelante ocurra ya no me concierne a mí sino a otro. Así, pues, al depositar esta pluma sobre la mesa y sellar esa confesión, pongo fin a la vida de ese desventurado que fue" (Stevenson, 1999: 124).

En *El retrato de Dorian Gray* el pintor Basil, el artista en busca permanente de la belleza, muere asesinado por el monstruo Dorian: "su muerte tiene sentido en la medida en la que su arte había perdido su sentido" (Fúnez, 2019: 218). La condena de Dorian es clara, su parte monstruosa, al igual que Hyde, lo aniquila y lo aboca a una muerte segura. Al final se suicida, su cuerpo ya sin vida envejece instantáneamente y el retrato recupera rápidamente la juventud y la lozanía. Al apuñalar al cuadro, a su alma monstruosa, alcanza por fin la paz y el sosiego y se libera de la culpa: "Miró a su alrededor y vio el cuchillo con el que mató a Basil Hallward. Lo había limpiado muchas veces, hasta que en él no quedó ninguna mancha. Estaba brillante y relucía. Como había matado al pintor mataría también la obra del pintor y todo lo que significaba. Podía matar el pasado y, cuando estuviera muerto, sería libre. Podía matar su monstruosa alma viviente y, sin su terrible influencia, alcanzaría la paz. Cogió el cuchillo y apuñaló a la pintura con él" (Wilde, 2009: 248).

En el caso de *Drácula*, la muerte de este supone la erradicación del mal y la vuelta al orden, así como la imposibilidad de perpetuación de su especie, al igual que sucede con Frankenstein. Así se narra en el libro: "solté un chillido cuando vi cómo le cortaba el cuello; mientras, en aquel mismo momento, el señor Morris le clavaba el cuchillo de monte en el corazón. Fue como un milagro; pero ante nuestros mismos ojos, y casi en un suspiro, todo el cuerpo se disolvió en polvo y desapareció de nuestra vista" (Stoker, 2022: 437).

Esta novela de finales del siglo XIX elimina al monstruo, al diferente, al que es incapaz de convertirse en parte de la sociedad y se convierte en antítesis de la humanidad y las normas sociales y morales: "Thus, Dracula's ultimate destruction signifies the triumph of civilization over atavism, the extinction of that ancient, dangerous culture, and the erradication of the vampiric disease required to restore balance and order to the Victorian era" (Ortiz Trueba, 2016: 21).

La mirada mítica

El elemento mítico es una de las constantes en las cuatro novelas, que recrean diferentes mitos, adaptándolos a las peculiaridades, contexto e intención de cada una. El sustrato mítico común de todas es la otredad, puesto que el monstruo representa la criatura ideada para reflejar nuestros terrores, deseos ocultos, aspiraciones. Por eso lo monstruoso atrae y repele a partes iguales (Ortiz Trueba, 2016).

La idea del otro ya está en el texto de Mary Shelley: Víctor y el monstruo son complementarios, ambos se llaman Frankenstein, de modo que "la dualidad entre creador y criatura refleja la escisión de la identidad" (Alonso Fernández, 2021: 127). Víctor, el hombre romántico por antonomasia que desafía las leyes de la naturaleza, no acepta al Otro, al monstruo que lleva dentro. En el prólogo de la obra de 1831 la autora narra el terror que le provocó la primera visión de su creación, fruto de su imaginación: "Vio aquella cosa horrible de pie junto a su lecho abriendo las cortinas y mirándole con sus ojos amarillos, acuosos y especulativos" (1996: 352). Ese monstruo será por tanto la parte que debe ser escondida y que al final se rebela contra su creador, asediándolo y persiguiéndolo hasta que al final se encuentran en los confines del mundo. Allí, desaparecido Víctor, la criatura afirmará: "Ha muerto aquel que me creó; y, cuando yo deje de existir, el recuerdo de ambos desaparecerá pronto" (344).

En Jekyll y Hyde el Otro no es creado artificialmente, sino que emerge del lado más primitivo y oscuro de la personalidad. En la novela se muestra cómo la monstruosidad reside también en Jekyll, hasta el punto de que lo que en principio era una transformación voluntaria se va haciendo inevitable, siendo Hyde el que prevalece al final.

En el texto de Stevenson se muestra la supremacía del lado oscuro, la irracionalidad, la liberación moral y la ausencia de responsabilidad que supone vivir al margen de las normas morales y las convenciones: "the established notion of an intrinsically rational human soul is put into question, exposing the existence of a different side within us, more distanced from the civilized manners" (Ortiz Trueba, 2016: 13).

Además, en este texto se muestra la dualidad no solo del hombre, sino de toda la sociedad, las calles respetables de Londres frente a los oscuros suburbios, la responsabilidad frente a la degradación.

El Otro, el monstruo, se asocia a la liberación sexual y la manifestación de los deseos ocultos. Así afirma Jonathan en *Drácula*: "sentí en el corazón el deseo deshonesto de que me besaran esos labios rojos" (Stoker, 2022: 49). El vampiro simboliza al igual que Hyde, el placer y la noche: "para un inglés victoriano [...] Drácula resulta, así, la perfecta encarnación del Otro" (Roas, 2019: 31).

También Dorian Gray proyecta en su retrato su monstruosidad moral, es un individuo ajeno a las reglas y símbolo de una sociedad hipócrita y libertina. El monstruo es él mismo en su manifestación interior: "el monstruo es aquel que no soy yo; por lo tanto, me resulta [...]

necesaria su existencia, para poder expiar la culpa de mi propia monstruosidad" (Alvarado Vega, 2018: 127).

El otro, el monstruo, provoca rechazo en el ser humano, repulsa ya patente en Frankenstein desde su propio nacimiento. En el primer encuentro con su criatura, en medio de una naturaleza de sublime belleza, Víctor afirma: "La gigantesca estatura y su aspecto deformado, más horrendo que nada de lo que existe en la realidad, me demostraron de inmediato que era el engendro, el repulsivo demonio" (Shelley, 1996: 179). De la misma manera, el físico de Hyde es como el de un primate, mientras que Drácula se puede convertir en murciélago, lagartija o lobo.

El otro en su plasmación del mal se relaciona con la figura del demonio. En varios pasajes de *Frankenstein* se hace hincapié en esta idea: "debía ser vuestro Adán, pero soy más bien el ángel caído a quien negáis toda dicha" (217), "con frecuencia pensaba en Satanás como el ser que mejor se adecuaba a mi situación, pues, como en él, la dicha de mis protectores a menudo despertaba en mí amargos sentimientos de envidia" (248).

El conde Drácula es la representación del maligno. Antes de llegar a su morada, en el hotel donde se aloja le previenen de su maléfica figura, le dan un crucifijo y la gente se despide de él santiguándose. Jonathan, prisionero en el castillo, descubre aterrado que su huésped es la reencarnación del demonio que aniquilará el mundo: "la cara hinchada tenía una sonrisa burlona que me enloqueció. Aquel era el ser que yo estaba contribuyendo a trasladar a Londres, donde podía pasar quizá siglos enteros saciando su sed de sangre entre la población y crear un círculo nuevo y siempre creciente de semidemonios depredadores de los desvalidos" (Stoker, 2022: 65).

En *Drácula*, el doctor Van Helsing propone como remedio para acabar con el maligno conde bendecir la tierra que el vampiro ha elegido para ejercer su poder colocando en ella la hostia consagrada. También será el doctor quien descubra la fórmula para acabar definitivamente con el no-muerto clavándole una estaca en el corazón y cortándole el cuello.

Además del doble, los textos analizados remiten a otras figuras míticas. Así, *Frankenstein* alude a Prometeo ya en su título (*Frankenstein o El moderno Prometeo*). Este mito aparece en textos de Hesiodo o Esquilo y alude al benefactor de la humanidad que desafía a Zeus al robar el fuego para entregárselo al género humano. Por esta acción será castigado y condenado a que un buitre le devore las entrañas. En la novela de Mary Shelley también Víctor desafía las leyes divinas al dar vida a la materia inerte. Además, uno de los primeros descubrimientos de la criatura es el fuego.

En la época romántica Prometeo fue uno de los mitos más versionados y acordes al espíritu de este periodo. Esta figura mítica se relaciona con la de Pigmalión o con la leyenda hebrea del Golem sobre el intento de dar vida a una estatua de barro.

El mito de Fausto, que anhela conocimiento, se relaciona también con el deseo de Dorian Gray de pactar con el diablo a cambio de conservar su juventud. Como afirma el hedonista lord Henry: "Para mí la belleza es la maravilla de las maravillas. Solamente la gente frívola no juzga por las apariencias. El verdadero misterio del mundo es lo visible, no lo invisible" (Wilde, 2009: 47). En la novela Dorian Gray pronuncia un conjuro "y se maldice con la juventud eterna" (Zamora Isabel, 2019: 15).

Otra figura mítica que aparece en la novela de Oscar Wilde es la de Narciso, que según la tradición se condenó al enamorarse de su propia belleza. En este caso Dorian "se convierte en una víctima de su propia imagen, mancillada en el reflejo del cuadro según comete atrocidades" (16).

También en *Frankenstein* la contemplación de la criatura en el agua lo hace consciente de su condición deformada y monstruosa. De la misma manera, el narcisista en su anhelo de proyectarse hacia otra persona idealizada y perfecta simboliza el espíritu de insatisfacción intrínseco al espíritu romántico y de fin de siglo que alienta a los escritores Mary Shelley y Oscar Wilde.

Presencia del simbolismo

Una de las constantes de las cuatro novelas es la aparición en ellas de elementos con valor simbolista, que en ocasiones se reiteran en varios de los textos analizados. En primer lugar, señalaremos el espejo, presente en mayor o menor medida en todas. Podemos afirmar que a nivel narrativo responden a una estructura especular conseguida por la configuración epistolar y la presencia de varios narradores que a su vez se convierten en narratarios dentro de la acción. En *Frankenstein* hay tres niveles narrativos: las cartas de Walton a su hermana en Londres, la narración de Víctor y la de la criatura. El propio monstruo aprende a hablar y leer observando a la familia De Lacey.

Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde combina la narración con documentos o cartas de crucial importancia para desentrañar la historia. Ya desde el principio el testamento del doctor revela que su fortuna pasaría a su amigo Hyde. Posteriormente, el anciano asesinado tenía un sobre dirigido a Mr. Utterson y al visitar la casa de Jekyll este tiene en su poder una carta escrita por Hyde. Poco después una nota de Jekyll con una invitación revela el parecido de ambas letras.

Al morir Lanyon, antiguo compañero de estudios de Jekyll, deja también una carta que Utterson no debe abrir hasta la desaparición de Jekyll. Cuando Poole y Utterson descubren a Jekyll tomándose la ampolla letal encuentran una nota afirmando que iba a morir. Las dos últimas cartas son la anunciada por Lanyon revelando la terrible verdad y cómo le proporcionó el contenido de la ampolla, y la del propio Jekyll, que culmina la historia y recompone todas las piezas de la misma. Esta estructura de cartas que se van superponiendo e implican a diferentes narratarios es el eje estructural de la acción.

Drácula está escrita enteramente en forma epistolar, convirtiéndose los diferentes personajes en narradores: Jonathan Harker, Mina, Van Helsing, etc., excepto uno, el propio conde, al que se silencia como personaje para mostrar su malignidad absoluta, no tiene derecho a tener voz.

Además de la estructura epistolar como metáfora especular, el espejo es un objeto de gran valor simbólico en los textos analizados. Así, en *Drácula,* el profesor Van Helsing afirma que el vampiro no proyecta sombra ni reflejo en los espejos, puesto que es un ser sin alma, un no-muerto, y por eso no aparece reflejado. Así lo experimenta Jonathan: "di un respingo, maravillado de no haberlo visto, dado que estaba viendo reflejada en el espejo toda la habitación a mi espalda" (Stoker, 2022: 49).

Si Drácula no soporta los espejos, el espejo es el que devuelve a Jekyll su monstruosa realidad y es siempre testigo de la transformación del protagonista hasta su trágico desenlace: "ésta será, pues, la última vez que Henry Jekyll pueda expresar sus pensamientos y ver su propio rostro (¡tan tristemente alterado!) reflejado en el espejo" (Stevenson, 1999: 123).

Uno de los objetos llenos de simbolismo en *El retrato de Dorian Gray* es el cuadro que alude de manera metonímica a su degradación: la mueca de crueldad que advierte Dorian tras su primera tropelía es un espejo de su horror interno. El retrato simboliza su alma vil y alejada de cualquier norma de manera que el autor "propone que sea el retrato el que le permita poder

vivir a Gray con toda su integridad" (Fúnez, 2019: 223). El protagonista opta por conservar su belleza a expensas de que su alma se vaya degradando cada vez más.

Cuando el pintor Basil observa su creación no puede menos que sentir horror: "Había algo en su expresión que le llenó de disgusto y repugnancia. ¡Cielos! ¡Estaba viendo el propio rostro de Dorian Gray! […] Era una terrible parodia, una infame e innoble sátira. Él nunca había hecho eso. Sin embargo, ¡era su propio cuadro!" (Wilde, 2009: 181).

Si el cuadro representa el alma de Dorian en la novela de Wilde, en *Drácula* la sangre simboliza también el interior del ser humano, de manera que al ser mordidos, los hombres dejan de serlo para estar sometidos al maligno conde: "the extraction of blood equals the extraction of the soul, which Dracula lacks and needs to survive" (Ortiz Trueba, 2016: 20).

Conclusiones

A lo largo de estas páginas hemos realizado un acercamiento a cuatro novelas del siglo XIX pertenecientes a la literatura inglesa que han dado lugar a figuras monstruosas célebres y de gran repercusión en la literatura y las artes posteriores: Frankenstein, Jekyll y Hyde, Dorian Gray y Drácula.

Los monstruos de estas novelas poseen elementos comunes, como la deformidad, su anomalía respecto a la sociedad en la que viven, la representación metafórica de los miedos y pulsiones del ser humano. En todas ellas se recrean en mayor o menor medida figuras míticas procedentes en algunos casos de textos clásicos y que han pervivido a lo largo de la historia de la literatura, como Prometeo, el Doble o el vampiro.

Los textos pertenecen al género de la novela gótica, fantástica y de terror y en algunos casos han sido considerados el antecedente del género de ciencia-ficción. El marco espacio temporal responde al espíritu romántico o postromántico que alienta las novelas y a la propia concepción del monstruo como un ser alejado de la realidad.

En definitiva, podemos concluir que estas cuatro novelas, con sus peculiaridades e idiosincrasia propias de la época o de sus narradores, reflejan las principales características de lo monstruoso, y aluden a nuestros miedos y pulsiones monstruosamente humanas.

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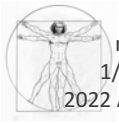

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The Distribution of the Sensible in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

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Keywords

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This article explores the concept developed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, the distribution of the sensible, and applies it to the analysis of the construction and perception of one of the best known monsters in literary history: Mr Hyde. As the distribution of the sensible refers, broadly speaking, to who is allowed to speak, what is visible and what remains invisible within a perceptual framework, this article offers an analysis of narrative voices that allow readers to get a glimpse of Mr Hyde's mysterious identity and his relationship with respectable Dr Jekyll. Their silences also speak of the true nature of this monster, special attention being given to the reasons why narrative voices fail to provide a full account of events. Consequently, what is said by various characters in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and what is left unsaid guide the study that ultimately attempts at determining the aesthetico-political regime the novella —written by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886— belongs to.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, written by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886, portrays one of the best known monsters in English literature. Mr Hyde is capable of committing hideous crimes against children and adults alike and some of them seem so sordid that their detailed descriptions are omitted. It might be said that the novel's appeal lies in the perceptions of the monster's atrocities and the way the mystery of his identity is unravelled by the different narrative voices present in the novel.

It is interesting to distinguish between the voices that are given the space to provide their account of the mystery and the voices that are silenced or lack enough space to develop their view in depth. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide a study of what becomes visible and what is invisibilized by the workings of the novel. In order to do so, the analysis will be based on the concept of the distribution of the sensible developed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In his book entitled The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible, this is defined as follows:

> A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution. (2004: 12)

First, Rancière's concept will be briefly discussed within the framework of the three regimes he proposes: ethical, representative and aesthetic. This will be followed by the in-depth analysis of the different narrative voices that become audible in the novel. The study of their words and silences will shed light into the world created in Stevenson's novel. Finally, our analysis will attempt at determining the particular aesthetico-political regime *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* belongs to.

Jacques Rancière's Distribution of the Sensible

Before developing this concept, it is necessary to highlight that Jacques Rancière's view of aesthetics is not restricted to art works but is inextricably linked to politics, i.e. to the life of a community. It helps shape a perception of the world which is created by a partition of the sensible.

According to a certain partition of the sensible, some sensory data are allowed to appear within a perceptual framework and some other data become invisible or inaudible; some subjects are allowed to designate such data and other subjects are silenced (10). This configuration is the distribution of the sensible, which establishes "boundaries that define, among other things, what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime", as stated by Rancière's translator, Gabriel Rockhill (1).

As mentioned above, literature takes an active part in a certain distribution of the sensible, which in turn determines the regime a given work of art belongs to. Rancière prefers to use the term "regime" to refer to different aesthetic moments. He distinguishes, based on art's role and purpose in the world, among three different regimes: ethical, representative and aesthetic.

The ethical regime is characterised by Rancière as the regime in which the matter is "knowing in what way images' mode of being affects the ethos, the mode of being of individuals and communities" (2011: 16). As such, art is valued if it illustrates truths or unmasks untruths which affect the character of a people.

Within a representative regime, the principle of mimesis becomes art's end and it organises ways of saying, doing and judging. Here, imitation is liberated from the constraints of ethical utility (Rockhill, 2004: 4) as mirroring reality becomes the only concern of art.

There is a different distribution of the sensible in the aesthetic regime since literature lacks an ethical purpose and its exemplary mimetic function, as highlighted by Hellyer and Murphet in their book *Rancière and Literature* (2016: 6). Literature here becomes independent from life and an equality of represented subjects can be perceived. The arts can represent anyone or anything as there is not a subject matter unfit for art. In the case of literature in particular, as a primacy of language becomes evident, writers show their concern with style and this is acknowledged by Rancière's highlighting the importance of the 'sonorous and imagistic power' of language in *Mute Speech* (2011: 43).

Visibility in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

The overview of this central concept developed by Jacques Rancière frames the analysis of the perception of the monster in Stevenson's novel. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* follows Mr Utterson's search for Mr Hyde, who puzzles and disturbs his quiet life since the moment he hears his name for the first time. Utterson, a respectable lawyer in Victorian society, is turned into an amateur detective given his urge to find Mr Hyde.

It is his own voice that can be heard louder than others in the narrative despite the fact that Stevenson resorts to a third-person narrator. This anonymous narrative voice can be identified with the attorney's since he is involved in all the events narrated. Mr Enfield first informs him of Hyde's villainous assault of a little girl. He is friends with Jekyll and worries when the doctor signs a cheque to help Hyde and when he includes Hyde in his will. He is also concerned with Dr Lanyon's deterioration and death —he is even the addressee of his confession. Poole, Jekyll's butler, comes to him when his master's ill health has become critical. Utterson even serves as the attorney for Sir Danvers Carew, one of Hyde's victims. As shown, the rest of the characters confide in him and turn to him, allowing him glimpses of the mystery from different perspectives and the possibility to give his analysis of events. It is precisely the fact that his own interpretation is visible in the text that allows the identification of the narrative voice with Utterson's perception of the monster.

The consciousness and ideology of the narrator seems to be affected by the character's personality and influences the information given to readers about the nature of the relationship between respectable Dr Jekyll and cruel Mr Hyde. Therefore, it seems profitable to study his personality in more depth. Utterson is introduced as "the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men" (Stevenson, 1994: 9). He shows himself as a gentleman who is willing to remain friends with someone whose reputation has suffered. Jekyll, whose name appears tainted by his association with Hyde, is not the first one to be helped by Utterson. In spite of his respectability and loyalty, this trait may show a furtive curiosity about more sordid ways of life, which in this case triggers Utterson's search for sinister Hyde. This is acknowledged by the character's determination to become "Mr Seek" (20).

Another trait that affects what becomes audible in the novel is his devotion to reason and common sense as he is constantly looking for rational explanations for the disturbing events narrated. According to the lawyer, blackmail explains Jekyll's decision to make Hyde his heir and forgery explains the similarity between Jekyll and Hyde's handwritings. Though logical, the lawyer's explanations sometimes appear to be improbable, even fantastic. For example, Utterson astonishingly believes that a serious illness which deforms the sufferer might be the reason for Jekyll's isolation, the alteration in his voice and his desperate need of a drug during his last days. Utterson himself acknowledges that his explanation is perfectly rational: "There is my explanation; it is sad enough, (...) but it is plain and natural, hangs well together" (52).

Therefore, the events that prevail in this account – the ones that are minutely narrated – are those which can be reasonably explained. The narrative voice records Utterson's conversations with Mr Enfield, Dr Lanyon and Jekyll himself. They all hint at the mystery but it is never accounted for by the narrative voice. This factual record at times reveals a lack of personal involvement which surprisingly contrasts Utterson's obsession triggered by his furtive curiosity. However, it might be argued that his attempt to preserve some orderliness and rationality is stronger and influences the form and tone of the narrative given that the discovery of bizarre events is informed with a rather factual and dispassionate tone.

This is also perceived in the book title and the chapter headings that structure the novel. In particular, the last two chapters make the omniscient narrative voice's withdrawal evident as there are two more voices that become audible in the novel and help to unravel the mystery.

In "Dr Lanyon's Narrative" the nature of the Jekyll-Hyde relationship is finally made explicit when Lanyon witnesses Hyde's transformation into Jekyll. However, as Lanyon is also devoted to reason, he remains unwilling to speak of the supernatural. The tone of Lanyon's account of events contrasts Utterson's as the doctor —a man of science— has had the shock of his life, which has destroyed his worldview. His contact with transcendental medicine has horrified him so much that all his narrative is full of passionate and vivid descriptions. Lanyon's language as he approaches the partial unravelling of the mystery becomes more and more melodramatic, which shows that his self-control is fading, a fact he seems to be aware of when he states: "a coolness that I was far from truly possessing" (67). Language mirrors his shaken worldview as his writing style verges on the unhealthy: incomplete sentences, constant interruptions and changing focuses of attention evince his anxiety. At the climatic point of the transformation, readers feel the immediacy to supernatural events, thanks to Lanyon's detailed and intensely vivid description and imagery.

> He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed; he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked there came, I thought, a change – he seemed to swell – his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter – and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leapt back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.
> 'O God!' I screamed, and 'O God!' again and again; for there, before my eyes – pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death – there stood Henry Jekyll! (68)

Through the astonished and terrified voice of Lanyon, this scene is masterfully drawn. These short clauses and sentences give the narrative a rhythm that conveys the character's urgency and despair. His search for specific words overwhelms him, which is clearly shown in his constant need for paraphrasis. Language becomes powerful enough to depict Hyde's features swelling, melting and altering in order to let readers know that the moment is extremely hideous. This supernatural process is violent and ravaging, causing the metamorphosing body to "reel", "stagger" and "gasp" while his injected eyes stare at the doctor. This passage exemplifies the primacy of language, whose words bear the ugliness and brutality of the scene.

The last chapter, "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case" is told by another guest narrator, Dr Henry Jekyll, whose letter finally allows readers to glimpse the events from the inside. As it is of a confessional nature, it is written in the first person and it contains an account of facts, emotions and, most interestingly, philosophical beliefs about the dual nature of man. As readers learn that Hyde is Jekyll's alter ego, they can understand why he becomes Jekyll's heir and why their handwriting is so similar. This also elucidates the reasons for Jekyll's changing state of physical and emotional health, Hyde's visit to Lanyon and Jekyll's bizarre disappearance from the window. And finally, Jekyll's own death is clarified.

By the end of the novel, after gaining access to the other, parallel narrative, readers may get the feeling that everything has fallen into place. However, despite Jekyll's attempt at

explaining the dual nature of man, his voice remains quite inaudible due to language's failure to fully acknowledge it.

The analysis so far can show that although a few subjects are allowed to speak in the text, the sensory data that make their way into the narrative are restricted for different reasons as it will be shown later. The distribution of the sensible produced by the information revealed challenges the narrative conventions of realism and the omniscient narrator. The perception of the world is also upset through the use of the fantastic, and the double in particular, as John Pennington argues (1994: 204).

Invisibility in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Although, as mentioned above, different voices shed light into the narrative, the presence of darkness is undeniable. Darkness is present throughout the novella not only as part of the eerie atmosphere created by night time but it is also perceived around the creation and description of Hyde. Though frequently referred to, Hyde's facial features remain in the dark. His is "a face that, in its singularity, refuses to yield to the totalising and unifying functions of vision, language and representation itself" (Townshend, 2019: 288). Like the lamp lights which partially illuminate the streets, the narrative voices can only provide vague information about Hyde's countenance. For instance, Mr Enfield's description is characterised by the insistent repetition of "something" which results in the alluded lack of precision as regards what makes Hyde so disgusting.

> 'He is not easy to describe. There is *something* wrong with his appearance; *something* displeasing, *something* downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed *somewhere*; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point. He's an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I can name nothing out of the way. No, sir; I can make no hand of it; I can't describe him. And it's not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment.' (15, emphasis added)

However vague, the choice of words manages to create an accurate picture of Hyde given that Enfield's failure to articulate creates an impression of Hyde as an uncanny figure, whose deformity is intangible yet definitely perceptible. Despite his involuntary silence, Hyde's extraordinary monstrosity is acknowledged by the people around him, provoking both disgust and hatred. In addition, when Utterson first evokes Hyde's assault of the girl, the man is referred to as a juggernaut, which reinforces his power, mercilessness and identification with evil but fails to physically characterise the monster. Readers, then, are entitled to wonder whether language can represent him. As Ronald Thomas claims, the novel is "ultimately concerned with fundamental questions about (…) the power of language to represent human life" (1986: 158).

It is also reasonable to wonder whether language can describe Jekyll's youthful sins and most of the depravities Hyde engages in. However, it is also possible that this silence is voluntary, as it may be caused by a refusal to speak about taboo topics, which evinces the repressive tendencies of the Victorian society Jekyll belongs to. Jekyll's silence constitutes an asset, though: it maintains the eerie atmosphere and suspense that an explicitness of words would have destroyed. His unsaid words let readers create a monster whose cruelty and evil are unrestrained.

Although Jekyll's voice is given enough space to make his confession, the character fails to provide an accurate account of his actions. Thus, the true nature of the primitive duality of man that Jekyll discovers within himself is not described in enough detail and readers cannot fully understand how man's two parts interact: "It was on the moral side, and in my own person that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness (...) I was radically both; and from an early date" (70).

He acknowledges that he, as well as all human beings, is half virtuous and half criminal, half moral and half amoral. In his way to separate these halves, he eventually succeeds only in separating out Hyde, his evil half, his dark side, while Jekyll himself remains both good and evil.

Even though in the passage quoted above Jekyll recognizes to possess both natures, this idea is not maintained throughout his "full statement of the case". On several occasions, Jekyll distances himself from Hyde and on others, he identifies with him. These are the extremes of an identification-distance continuum. This complex, dynamic relationship between the two "sides" is reflected by the language Jekyll, the author of the confession, uses to refer to either of his sides.

The Jekyll-Hyde identification is explicitly acknowledged when, for instance, Jekyll looks at Hyde in the mirror after taking the drug for the first time and shows his awareness of his dual nature: "And yet when I looked at that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself" (73).

The character's choice of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives on several occasions support the Jekyll-Hyde identification as they make the barriers separating the two sides disappear every time Jekyll resorts to first person pronouns in order to speak of Hyde's "pleasures": "When I came back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity" (75), "my adventures" (76). Surprisingly enough, Jekyll identifies himself with Hyde even when Sir Danvers is murdered: "my lust of evil", "my crime" (81), a fact that reveals a growing power of the dark side over Dr Jekyll. However, after this crime, which can be considered the worst of all, Jekyll's repulsion towards the murderer, gains more power.

The lexical choice at times evinces a great distance projected by both sides; Jekyll talks about Hyde as a creature, depriving him of a human status, as shown in: "Hyde in danger of his life was a creature new to me: shaken with inordinate anger, strung to the pitch of murder, lusting to inflict pain. Yet the creature was astute; mastered his fury with a great effort of the will" (84). Though mainly characterised as an animal moved by instinct or passion, Hyde, curiously, possesses a will which overrides his irrational behaviour. A few lines below, the distance grows as the narrative voice insists on characterizing him as devoid of humanity by comparing to a hellish creature "That child of hell has nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred" (84).

Similarly, Hyde does not consider Jekyll as a peer, but the doctor is used as a hiding place: "Jekyll was now my city of refuge; but let Hyde peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him" (82). It is particularly interesting to emphasise that the distance here is also projected by both voices when they resort to the third person to talk about the other as if they were completely separate individuals: Jekyll speaks as if Hyde's death would not be his own. This passage evinces the dynamism in the narrator, constantly moving from one perspective to another.

There are other instances in which the distance projected by Jekyll is even more considerable because the grammatical choice is reinforced by a lexical one. For example, when Jekyll refers to Hyde's monstrous pleasures, he states: "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty" (76). Some lines below he accepts some responsibility with respect to Hyde's depravities, but he does not see himself as the perpetrator: "Into the details of the infamy at which I thus connived (for even now I can scarce grant that I committed it) I have no design of entering" (76). After the murder, the distance becomes irreversible: "Thenceforward, he sat all day over the fire in the private room (…). He, I say –I cannot say, I. That child of hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred" (84).

Between the two extremes in the continuum mentioned above, Jekyll resorts to some nominal constructions that express a certain closeness between the two halves: "my disguise", "my double", "my second self", "my second character", "my other self" (75, 76, 78, 83, 86).

On the other hand, there are instances in which Jekyll refers to Hyde as "my devil", "the animal within me", "the brute that slept within me" (80, 82, 85). These nominal expressions show a curious phenomenon: whereas the first person possessive adjective and pronouns reflect closeness, the nouns unequivocally show Jekyll's utter disgust with Hyde.

The differentiation between Jekyll and Hyde reaches a climax towards the end of Jekyll's confession, when he cannot deny Hyde's increasing power taking over the doctor's body and, by extension, life. He becomes aware of his own death, which is prior to the darker side's death: "I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen, and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (88).

Writing has kept Jekyll alive, since he exists as long as he writes down his story, shocking as it might be. His carefully constructed discourse shows the truly dynamic nature of the Jekyll-Hyde relationship, and this is the reason why the readers' attempt at classifying or fully understanding the bond might not be successful, rendering the truth in the dark.

The aesthetico-political regime of the novella

The analysis of what the narrative voices say and omit, of the pieces of information revealed and withheld show how suspense is created in Stevenson's work as it is rather difficult for readers to gain access to Hyde's true nature. Stevenson provides readers with voices that remain in the dark either voluntarily or involuntary despite the light shed little by little into the mystery of the fabrication of monstrous Hyde. Even when more sensory data are allowed to appear in the narrative as, for instance, the fact that Jekyll can become Hyde —and vice versa— by means of a drug, readers' intrigue is heightened by the supernatural status of the explanation and suspense is increased by their need for details or reasons.

Although different subjects such as Utterson, Enfield, Lanyon, Jekyll and Hyde are given some space to share their sensory and extrasensory perception of the monster, the distribution does not seem balanced and it would be difficult to claim the existence of an equality of represented subjects, a distinguishing feature of the aesthetic regime.

However, the work belonging to this regime may be argued given that this novella proves that there is not subject matter unfit for literature as ugliness, deformity, crime and evil, scientific experimentation and death are all addressed by means of detailed descriptions or ominous silences which can be as telling as – or sometimes even more than – an abundance of explicit words. Therefore, the primacy of language becomes evident in the study of the carefully selected words. As in many literary works belonging to this regime, every single word

is significant and worthy of analysis. This is also acknowledged by Robbie Goh who believes that "in this novel, narrative itself is the site of meaning, of textual process that operate prior to narrower thematic concerns and to simplifying social oppositions" (1999: 159). It is through the language chosen to make its way into the narrative that readers can find aesthetic, social and political meaning. This is crucial to determine that *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* belongs to the aesthetic regime.

This view does not contradict, but rather reinforces Jacques Rancière's belief in the politics of literature which implies that "literature 'does' politics as literature – that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing" (2004: 10).

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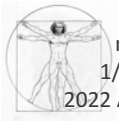

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Lectura naște monștri – creaturile livrești ale Angliei victoriene

Reading Breeds Monsters – The Bookish Creatures of Victorian England

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Această lucrare are în prim-plan contextul care înglobează întâlnirile textuale monstruos distorsionate dintre patru personaje feminine – Catherine Earnshaw, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke and Dinah Morris – și cuvântul scris, văzut ca entitate periculoasă. Emily Brontë și George Eliot realizează un tur al bibliotecilor ficționale deținute de eroine pentru a semnala anxietățile secolului al XIX-lea cu privire la transformarea lecturii colective, intensive în practică individuală și extensivă. Modificarea drastică a tiparelor de lectură aduce cu sine deprinderea femeilor cu lectura necălăuzită, de plăcere, în defavoarea obligațiilor casnice. În același context social care neagă existența unui public cititor feminin rafinat, textele citite și semnate de femei încep să sporească și să se diversifice. Cele două romaniciere adoptă, la rândul lor, pseudonime literare, fiind constrânse să-și ascundă identitatea publică. O mare parte din fascinația pe care referințele intertextuale încorporate de *La răscruce de vânturi*, *Moara de pe Floss*, *Middlemarch* și *Adam Bede* o au asupra personajelor feminine este legată de căutarea unui mijloc de explorare și expansiune. Scopul acestei lucrări este să clarifice contribuția controversată pe care femeile au adus-o actului hermeneutic care, în secolul al XIX-lea, nu numai că frapa și inducea frică paralizantă în cititori, dar totodată sfătuia, educa și delecta audiența.

Cuvinte-cheie

monştri-bibliotecă; lectura-derapaj; cititoarea Medusa; ideologii victoriene conflictuale; diformitate; depravare.

This paper deals with the context in which the monstrously distorted textual encounters of the four female characters – Catherine Earnshaw, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke and Dinah Morris –and the printed word seen as a dangerous entity occur. Emily Brontë and George Eliot bring to the forefront their heroines' library tour of fictional choices to raise red flags related to 19th-century anxieties about women readers who begin to incarnate the texts read in solitude. The drastic change of reading patterns in the 19th-century involves, by extension, women's habituation with unguided reading for pleasure instead of domestic duties. Within the same social context denying the existence of a sophisticated female reading public, there is a spectacular growth and diversification of texts penned and read by women. The two novelists themselves, both of whom assume a pen name, remain hesitant about the disclosure of their public persona. Much of the fascination that the embedded intertexts of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch* and *Adam Bede* hold over the female characters is linked with their quest for personal exploration and expansion. The aim of this paper is to illuminate women's conflicting contribution to hermeneutical events which, in the nineteenth-century, not only appall and paralyze readers with fear, but also admonish, instruct, and entertain the audience.

Keywords

library monsters; dangerous reading; reading Medusa; conflicting Victorian ideologies; deformity; depravity.

Introducere

Geniul literar a fost considerat, de-a lungul vremii, cauză sau simptom vădit al unei monstruoase nevroze, darul său scriitoricesc înscriindu-se mai degrabă în sfera încercărilor ambiţioase de a compensa infirmităţi tăinuite. Biografia unor mari scriitori ai lumii înfăţişează dizgraţia vieţii private, atinsă de maladie şi „castrare" simbolică – Alexander Pope a fost, se pare, cocoşat, suferind de tuberculoză; Lord Byron – şubred, bolnăvicios şi schilod; Marcel Proust – dublu vătămat de astm şi nevroză. Virginia Woolf s-a căsătorit cu un intelectual care a înţeles „sacerdoţiul ei, scrisul", dar tot era tulburată de „demonii ei (halucinaţii, coşmaruri, insomnii, anorexie)" (Siguret, 2009: 30) şi copleşită de viziuni cu „monştri păroşi şi alte creaturi diabolice" (34). Mai mult decât atât, în concepţia freudiană, omul cu peniţa creatoare de noi înţelesuri e un nevrotic pernicios care încearcă, prin artificii livreşti, să evite colapsul, sustrăgându-se, concomitant, vindecării. Personajele feminine din romanul victorian citesc până în punctul în care viaţa lor se confundă cu viaţa cărţilor, amintind, premonitoriu, de *Bibliotecarul* lui Giuseppe Archimboldo. Bibliotecarul, în viziunea archimboldiană, e un monstru lectorial, o adevărată existenţă livrescă cu chip şi trunchi alcătuite din cărţi. *Bibliotecarul* devine, în acest context, „o primejdioasă alienare într-o identificare a vieţii *trăite* cu cea *citită*" (Balotă, 2007: 6), un subtil *caveat lector* – „devii ceea ce citeşti", pare să rostească figura pictorială.

Le pândeşte, oare, pe femeile intelectuale ale secolului al XIX-lea, aceeaşi primejdie, acelaşi destin monstruos care îl seduce pe Don Quixote, transformându-l într-o dublură a textelor citite? Contrar opiniei comune, însă, povestea lui Don Quixote arată că omul care citeşte nu trăieşte *în* cărţi şi *din* cărţi, ci „se poate schimba cu totul, schimbându-i şi pe cei din jurul lui" (Manolescu, 2002: 213), făcându-l să exclame, aidoma lui Manolescu, „Sufletul mi-e vesel, oho, pentru că n-am citit toate cărţile" (219). Următoarele secţiuni urmăresc modul în care Catherine Earnshaw, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke şi Dinah Morris, patru cititoare înverşunate prinse în mrejele creatoare victoriene, se lasă captivate de voluptatea ascetică a cititului şi a scrisului ce le plămădeşte. Romanele care le cuprind, înghiţindu-le într-un gest care aminteşte de mitul biblic al pescarului Iona captiv în burta unui „monstru" marin, fac din călătoria personajelor adevărate odisee. Romanele nu numai că sunt construite pe tiparul cititului care cuprinde, la scară mai mică, cititul ficţional, cu ritualul, ceremoniile şi artificiile romaneşti proprii fiecăruia, dar conţin personaje-librării (groteşti la o primă lectură), şi ele parte din anatomia gigantului univers-bibliotecă.

Odată cu revoluţia industrială şi tehnică din secolul al XIX-lea, în societatea Angliei victoriene s-a instalat tot mai serios tendinţa de instruire a femeii. Educaţia femeilor, însă, se împacă cu „tradiţionalismul care încătuşează trupurile şi minţile copiilor în convenţii, în special ale fetelor, obişnuite mai degrabă să se prefacă decât să trăiască, lăsate neşcolarizate şi deloc instruite" (Siguret, 2009: 31). O incursiune în perioada în care cititul era considerat o activitate primejdioasă indică numeroase exemple de femei în vecinătatea cărţilor: femei citind, folosind cărţile pe post de recuzită şi, în unele cazuri, plasând cărţile sub egida emancipării. Pedagogi, doctori, critici literari şi autori ai manualelor de instrucţiuni emiteau judecăţi cu privire la ce, cât, unde şi cum ar trebui să practice specia aflată sub zodia femininităţii actul lecturii, cel mai adesea împiedicând-o să abandoneze universul gospodăresc. Semnificativă în acest context este persoana lui Margaret Fuller – scriitoare americană a secolului al XIX-lea, de o inteligenţă remarcabilă şi cu o pregătire intelectuală demnă de implicarea pe terenul transcendentalismului şi al feminismului – care pledează în *Femeia secolului al XIX-lea* din 1845 pentru recunoaşterea egală a bărbaţilor şi a femeilor, susţinând necesitatea eliberării celor din urmă de sub oprimarea socială. Pentru transcedentalista Margaret Fuller, feminitatea şi masculinitatea nu sunt, în fond,

decât concepte abstracte, propăşirea unuia nefiind realizabilă fără propăşirea celuilalt. Într-un ultim strigăt de disperare le cere femeilor „neatârnare, (...), încrederea în sine şi ascultarea propriilor porniri" (Fuller, 2006: 124).

Femeile au pornit la drum, în istoria umanităţii, cu stângul. Din pricina Evei, cuplul primordial a fost izgonit din Rai. Toposul femeii ca instrument al diavolului a stat apoi la baza tuturor explicaţiilor. Încă din antichitate, femeile – bibliofile *avant la lettre* – s-au străduit să se lepede de statutul decorativ şi pasiv care le era atribuit, nu cu armele lecturii furtive, ci subtil, remarcându-se prin spirit negustoresc. Femeile Spartei îşi gestionau averile cu iscusinţă. Cele din perioada bizantină mânuiau afaceri şi se angajau în discuţii pe teme religioase controversate. Mai apoi, cultura elisabetană a îngăduit societăţii să privească spiritul feminin cu alţi ochi, iar odată cu Iluminismul au început a se delimita cîteva tipuri sociale – femeia aristocrată, burgheză, muncitoarea şi ţăranca – în lupta pentru suveranitate intelectuală. Femininului nu îi mai este îngrădit dreptul la educaţie, deşi este considerat a fi lipsit de fluiditatea raţiunii şi împânzit cu emoţie. Femeile secolului al XVIII-lea, în schimb, au alternativa de a fi educate acasă sau în şcoli de fete. Astfel, femeile Iluminismului ajung să fie purtătoare independente ale propriului lor cuvânt, contopit cu destinele incorporate de lectura în care se refugiază. Moda saloanelor literare se impune decisiv nu numai în Anglia, ci şi în Italia şi în Germania. Mai mult decât atât, „marile *Salonnières* din Franţa, cercul de *Bluestockings* din Anglia" (Bock, 2002: 22) au câştigat, la vremea lor, o reputaţie internaţională. În secolul al XIX-lea, din gama restrânsă de oportunităţi profesionale, se distinge femeia dedicată pedagogiei, aşa cum o ilustrează romanele englezeşti în postura guvernantei, o creatură ambiguă, la hotarul dintre slujitorime şi domesticitate maternă. Alături de *factory girl*, guvernanta a devenit "un simbol pentru femeile necăsătorite" (133). Îngerului din interiorul casei i s-a permis să devină „îngerul din afara casei, care prin activităţi sociale, de inspiraţie filantropică sau religioasă, poartă sfera feminină în public" (115). Femeile câştigă, astfel, un rol aparent activ pe scena societăţii, cochetând cu filantropia şi cu religia. Cu toate acestea, „munca şi lumea erau problema bărbatului, căminul şi viaţa domestică, a femeii" (110). Femeia are nevoie „să ia cu asalt bibliotecile", credeau contemporanii acesteia, căci forţa derivată din cărţi era necesară familiei, statului, societăţii ca atare, dar nu cititoarei în sine.

Dacă cititorii neavizaţi nu cer literaturii decât o doză de amuzament, de destindere, un răgaz de la viaţa cotidiană cu ale ei ediţii mereu adăugite şi retuşate, personajele care îşi converg spre citit tot miezul lor lăuntric trăiesc lecturile cu fervoare, adevărate Himere homeriene, se identifică cu viaţa ficţiunilor, le interpretează şi se inserează în centrul firului narativ, contribuind cu soarta lor la făurirea cărţilor. Acest lucru este cu adevărat posibil atunci când conturul dintre „prim-plan" şi „fond" din textele ficţionale e conştientizată de cititor, care „începe să resimtă sistemul de referinţă în care este cuprins şi care nu putea deveni obiect al reprezentării sale atât timp cât îi guverna comportamentul" (Iser, 2006: 225). Adevăruri sociale inconfortabile devin vizibile în şi prin artă, aşa cum o fac romanele lui Dickens, aducând în faţa publicului o „structură de temă şi orizont" (229), modificând, cu alte cuvinte, conştiinţa colectivă. Devine şi mai justificată, astfel, figura unui *unreliable narrator* în decursul secolului al XIX-lea, care pare a depune mărturie pentru „divizarea perspectivelor narative ale textului" (289) oferit de autor ca model de experienţă, fără posibilitate de orientare a cititorului.

Adevărata recuzită a literaturii secolului al XIX-lea poate fi prinsă în ramele ipostazelor lectoriale ale femeilor din *La răscruce de vânturi*, *Moara de pe Floss*, *Middlemarch* şi *Adam Bede*. Aceste romane nu posedă numai o importanţă istorică, ci şi deschid poarta către ideologia vremii. Actul lecturii în sine şi obiectul lecturii protagonistelor înfăţişează natura lor interioară,

intenţiile tematice ale romanelor şi perspectivele culturale ambigue asupra naşterii unui nou model de existenţă feminină, înfricoşător şi seducător deopotrivă: femeia care citeşte.

Profilul cititoarei din Anglia secolului al XIX-lea

Lectorii perioadei victoriene citesc mimetic, iar femeile văd literatura ca pe o reflecţie a vieţii şi îşi delimitează modele în persoana eroinelor cu care „interacţionează". Aceeaşi epocă este definită de ostilitatea faţă de ficţiune. Reprezentarea ficţională a femeii cititoare în perioada victoriană devine subiect de controversă în literatura serializată în publicaţii periodice, reviste, romane, poezie, pictură şi ilustraţie de carte, pe teren educaţional şi religios. Deşi lectura vădea prezenţa unui spirit nobil şi, în acelaşi timp, un imbold de învăţare, poveştile de dragoste şi ficţiunea îmbibată în senzaţional şi în grotesc erau considerate un pericol pentru sănătatea reproductivă a femeilor şi pentru dezvoltarea lor morală. De altfel, cu câteva secole în urmă, eroii *Infernului* dantesc, Paolo şi Francesca, se îndrăgostesc unul de celălalt ca o consecinţă a cititului. Puteau, oare, cititoarele vremii combate ideea conform căreia omul care citeşte se alege cu minţile rătăcite? Acestea îşi caută „drum prin literatura oficială (..), pentru a găsi reflectări ale propriilor vieţi în poveştile Clitemnestrei, ale Gertrudei, ale curtezanelor lui Balzac" şi devin (adesea simbolic) scriitoare, inventându-şi „noi modalităţi de a spune poveşti, astfel încât să înregistreze pe pagină cronicile de fiecare zi ale vieţilor lor exilate în laboratorul bucătăriei, în studioul încăperii de cusut, în jungla camerei copiilor" (Manguel, 2011: 273). Cele mai multe argumente veneau împotriva lecturii ca act solitar, nesupravegheat de o instanţă masculină, pe care o asociau cu infertilitatea precoce, afecţiuni uterine, nevralgie, isterie, cu stări de nervozitate, demenţă şi moarte prematură. Lectura, cu noul ei statut de derapaj, de încălcare de normă, de infirmitate, sabota rolurile prestabilite de o societate patriarhală, temere ascunsă sub masca consecinţelor vătămătoare sănătăţii. Opţiunea preferată era cititul cu voce tare, căci alegerea materialului de citit era musai unul acceptabil din punct de vedere social pentru lector şi auditoriu, obligându-l adesea pe cititor „să fie mai meticulos, să citească fără să sară sau să revină la unele pasaje, acordând textului o anumită formalitate rituală" imposibil de obţinut în „mâinile capricioase ale cititorului solitar" (151).

Publicul feminin format într-o şcoală a prozei sentimentale era în primejdia de a căpăta o atitudine nonconformistă, de a fi acaparat de „demonul amiezei", mergând până la situarea în afara sferei moralităţii şi la împrumutul nedemn de opinii care ar fi putut aboli un sistem convenţional de gândire. Femeia devine, prin simplul fapt că posedă cărţi de un anume fel, „cineva care pune întrebări, o minte în care (...) arde curiozitatea, o rebelă" (252). Cumplitul demon cu mii de feţe al depresiei, cel despre care aminteau Părinţii Bisericii gândindu-se la sentimentul de inerţie şi de neputinţă de care erau cuprinşi isihaştii, atacă acut femeile „în anii de fecunditate", cu toate că „biologia singură nu explică rata înaltă a depresiei feminine" (Solomon, 2017: 212). Demonul depresiei nu-i ocoleşte, însă, nici pe bărbaţi, dar modul în care cele două categorii de populaţie înfruntă monstrul alienării e diferit. În secolul al XIX-lea, industrializarea şi „abandonare[a] noţiunii de Dumnezeu şi de finalitate" a însemnat „fondul melancoliei victoriene" (409). În aceeaşi epocă victoriană, numărul de aziluri pentru îngrijirea celor atinşi de maladia depresiei a înflorit. În 1807, „2,26 persoane la fiecare zece mii din populaţia Angliei erau declarate alienate mintal", iar după cinci decenii, în 1860, numărul acestora a crescut la 29, 63 (404). Perfecţionarea transporturilor, instabilitatea claselor sociale, gama largă de opţiuni lectoriale – în termeni politici, brusca libertate a clasei de mijloc – au generat, fără îndoială, mutaţii sociale, senzaţia de „perpetuă disoluţie" (517) specifică secolului

al XIX-lea. Inevitabil, acest sentiment de alienare şi de disconfort în noua lume industrializată a acaparat-o şi pe femeia cititoare.

Ca atare, romanul (specie narativă relativ nouă în perioada aceasta) a căpătat o poziţie marginală prin puterea de a exercita asupra cititorului o imensă forţă hermeneutică, aproape supranaturală. Audienţa romanului s-a intensificat şi datorită factorului economic – costurile scăzute în materie de hârtie şi de tipărire. Din acelaşi motiv, până la finele secolului, majoritatea nu cumpără cărţi „serioase", acestea fiind mult mai scumpe. Pe de o parte, romanele împuterniceau femeile, oferindu-le modele sau expunându-le unei lumi dincolo de realitatea de zi cu zi. Pe de altă parte, criticii practicilor lectoriale se temeau că ficţiunea, descriind relaţii clandestine, nemulţumire faţă de datoriile casnice sau dorinţe de descătuşare din mrejele supunerii, ar seduce cititoarele naive, conducându-le spre o stare perpetuă de „cârteală" şi, ca atare, ar rupe o pânză socială ţesută abil. Aşadar, pentru unii, lectura sub semnul femininului a devenit sinonimă cu monstruozitatea, barbaritatea, viciul, degradarea, promiscuitatea, nefericirea fătişă şi depravarea, transformând devoratoarele de cărţi într-o înfricoşătoare şi ucigătoare Clytemnestra. De altfel, în *Bîlciul deşertăciunilor*, publicat în foileton între 1847 şi 1848, William Makepeace Thackeray o identifică pe Rebecca Sharp – inteligentă, dar capabilă de înşelătorii perfide – cu Clytemnestra, confirmând temerile societăţii la fel de înşelătoare din care Rebecca face parte:

> „Clytemnestra se strecoară cu repeziciune în încăpere, asemenea unei năluci – braţele-i sînt goale şi albe, părul-i întunecat i se revarsă pe umeri, faţa-i palidă ca moartea, iar ochii ei sînt mistuiţi de-o flacără atît de sinistră, încît toată lumea se cutremură privind-o. (...) Rebecca îşi jucase rolul atît de desăvîrşit şi cu atîta teribilă naturaleţe, încît toţi spectatorii rămaseră muţi cîtva timp. (...) Actorii fură chemaţi la rampă şi încăperea răsună de strigătele: „Regizorul! Clytemnestra!" (...) Un înalt personaj din asistenţă stărui să fie prezentat fermecătoarei Clytemnestra. „Să-i înfingă pumnalul în piept şi să se mărite cu altul, hai?" fu observaţia foarte bine venită a alteţei-sale regale. (...) Becky izbucni în rîs: şi plină de voioşie şi privind cu îndrăzneală, ea făcu cea mai drăgălaşă reverenţă ce s-a văzut vreodată." (Thackeray, 1972: 89-91)

Scrisul subversiv al personajului feminin în *La răscruce de vînturi*

Emily Brontë creează imaginea reprezentativă a unei cititoare răzvrătite. În *La răscruce de vînturi* (1847), Biblia se desparte radical de nuanţa de ghid spiritual. Subminarea Bibliei poate fi văzută ca o formă de revoltă susţinută de autoare în mod tacit. Catherine Earnshaw, la o primă lectură, căpătă forma unui înger căzut, răzvrătit împotriva ordinii divine. Cititorul obişnuit nu o surprinde pe protagonistă citind în mod explicit, ci mai degrabă descoperă, prin intermediul naratorului Lockwood, o mică bibliotecă, atunci când acesta e nevoit să-şi petreacă noaptea în casa neprimitoare a lui Heathcliff. Naratorul găseşte o Biblie veche, cu miros de mucegai, a cărei foaie albă de început purta inscripţia „Catherine Earnshaw, cartea ei" (Brontë, 1995: 24) şi o dată, cu un sfert de veac în urma timpului diegetic. Romanul dezvăluie statutul femeii care îşi vocalizează trăirile pe marginile unei cărţi simbolizând reţeta sacrosanctă a unei societăţi patriarhale stabile. Sabotând cea mai desăvârşită carte cu caracter dogmatic, Catherine o transformă într-un jurnal personal menit a-i găzdui dezolarea. Fiecare porţiune albă lăsată de tipograf e îmbrăcată în scrisul subversiv al protagonistei. Catherine pare să fi avut acces la cărţi, starea de uzură a acestora depunând mărturie pentru modul avid în care au fost folosite.

Protagonista rescrie tomul veterotestamentar şi-i reconfigurează identitatea textuală. Lockwood încearcă să-i descifreze personalitatea prin amprenta scriitoricească – hieroglifele spălăcite cu caracter de palimpsest. Încă de la începuturi, femeile cititoare au găsit „moduri de abordare subversivă a materialului pe care societatea îl pune pe rafturile lor" (Manguel, 2011: 268). Dimensiunea pragmatică a paratextului pe care Catherine îl impune Bibliei se manifestă „sub forma unei manipulări, suportată în mod conştient sau inconştient", cu scopul de a „acţiona asupra cititorului (cititorilor) şi de a încerca să le modifice, într-o anumită direcţie, reprezentările sau sistemele de aşteptări" (Lane, 2007: 21). Alături de Heathcliff, Catherine se răzvrăteşte azvârlind broşurile evanghelice ale servitorului morocănos Joseph. Scrisul-revoltă cu valenţe demonice devine unica opţiune de protest chiar şi când, copilă fiind, aşteaptă să fie pedepsită de fratele mai mare, Hindley. Trăind într-o lume în care femeile nu puteau să-şi aroge voluptatea (auto)instruirii cu uşurinţă, Catherine acţionează cutezător în perimetrul tezaurului sapienţial al epocii – însemnările cu caracter zeflemitor defăimează conţinutul cărţii sfinte.

Deloc întâmplător, această Medusa victoriană se semnează în trei moduri – Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff şi Catherine Linton – act sugestiv atât pentru însemnătatea trioului Medusa – Steno – Euriale, cât şi, aparent, pentru instabilitatea structurii ei identitare şi cele două iubiri între care a oscilat. În realitate, Catherine este „anihilată volitiv" de Heathcliff şi Edgar Linton deopotrivă, devenind o „anexă" a celor doi (Cuţitaru, 2016: 105). După moartea ei timpurie, o „necesitate epică" (107), nicidecum un accident, numele este cedat fiicei, care pune în lumină un model de success al actului lecturii cu iz de luptă pentru supremaţia gândirii. Cititoare pătimaşă încă din copilărie, Catherine Heathcliff Linton se află la Heights fără cărţi, simţindu-se întemniţată. Dacă iniţial refuză atenţia naivului verişor Hareton, ulterior îi devine tutore într-ale cititului. Mult mai docilă decât mama sa, lui Catherine îi este mai uşor a „vâsli" pe apele tulburi ale legilor patriarhale. Drepturile femeii-cititor sunt, aşadar, revendicate de a doua generaţie. Finalul romanului e, însă, e o invitaţie la o dublă interpretare. Ce preferăm, în fond, noi, cititorii externi – cartea care aduce în prim-plan domolirea vechilor tensiuni interpersonale, intrapersonale şi sociale prin intermediul literaturii sau cea care refuză să-şi astâmpere nălucile (oamenii din Yorkshire jură pe Biblie că Heathcliff şi Catherine umblă, *post-mortem*), permiţându-le să se întoarcă şi să tulbure echilibrul narativ? Ambele tipuri de romane, în fapt, au sălaş în interiorul aceloraşi coperţi.

Apetitul literar cu iz de prevestire a sorţii în *Moara de pe Floss*

Această secţiune analizează lectura cu caracter vizionar practicată de Maggie Tulliver, protagonista romanului *Moara de pe Floss*, publicat de Mary Anne Evans în 1860, sub pseudonimul masculin George Eliot. Deşi fiecare roman al scriitoarei înglobează ceva din propriile lecturi, Maggie este, probabil, o reflecţie ficţională a autoarei, întrucât copilăria şi adolescenţa celor două coincid. În debutul cărţii I, Maggie se află la vârsta fragedă la care cuvântul scris poate avea consecinţe nefaste în plan biologic şi moral, conform temerilor epocii. Maggie tânjeşte după cărţi care să conţină „mai mult", neajuns care constituie cheia forului ei interior. Lectura devine esenţială pentru apetitul intelectual al protagonistei, alarmându-i pe conservatorii din St. Ogg's, a căror agresivitate oarbă o va resimţi spre finalul cărţii. Chiar domnul Tulliver considera că e prea isteaţă pentru o femeie şi că aceasta îi va provoca numai neajunsuri. Trei texte-cheie citite de Maggie în momente importante ale vieţii ei pun în lumină atitudinea epocii faţă de femeile care se dedau lecturii. Pentru a investiga raportul dintre Maggie şi cuvântul scris, este nevoie de un lector avizat, care să cunoască dedesubturile fiecărui intertext – *Povestea diavolului* (1726) de Daniel Defoe, *Corinne* (1807) de Anne Louise Germaine

de Staël şi *Imitaţiunea lui Cristos* (1426) de Thomas à Kempis. Aşadar, romanul pune în lumină ekphrasisul prin care se trimite explicit la o operă de artă, tehnica narativă a lui Eliot influenţând şi reconstruind textele introduse în miezul scrierilor sale. Cărţile al căror conţinut este reinterpretat de Maggie oferă o privire în hăţişul caracterului şi naturii acesteia, extinzându-se în arii tematice şi prefigurând deznodământul romanului.

Încă din copilărie, Maggie citeşte cu ardoare şi trădează o capacitate intelectuală net superioară caracterului pragmatic al lui Tom, fratele protagonistei. Totuşi, domnul Stelling, profesorul lui Tom, confirmă prejudecăţile unei întregi epoci când se raportează la Maggie, susţinând că femeile pot prinde câte puţin din toate, având o doză de inteligenţă artificială. Ilustraţiile din *Povestea diavolului* o fac să empatizeze cu vrăjitoarea condamnată, punând-o sub înrăurirea unui tipar ficţional în plasa căruia va pica, în cele din urmă, atrăgând oprobriul general. Citind Povestea diavolului, Maggie constată că „diavolul (…) ia înfăţişarea oamenilor răi şi umblă de colo-colo şi-i îndeamnă pe oameni la rele. De obicei se ascunde sub înfăţişarea unui om rău, fiindcă, (…), dacă lumea ar vedea că-i diavol şi dacă el ar ţipa la oameni, aceştia ar fugi şi atunci nu i-ar mai putea convinge să facă ce vrea el" (Eliot, 1964: 43). Protagonista năzuieşte spre acea învăţătură de care s-au bucurat oamenii luminaţi, mistuindu-şi fiinţa de dorul de a afla tainele vieţii, de a învăţa singură ce ştiau înţelepţii. Mai târziu, Maggie încearcă să-şi tăgăduiască plăcerea de a citi, considerând că viaţa ei măruntă face parte dintr-un întreg călăuzit de divinitate şi dând ascultare vocii îndepărtate din Evul Mediu a scriitorului mistic german Thomas à Kempis. În cartea a V-a, destinul lui Maggie se încrucişează cu o altă carte cu caracter profetic, când, adolescentă fiind, se întâlneşte cu Philip Wakem la Red Deeps. Împiedicată să urmeze ţelurile serbede ale unui ascetism limitat, citeşte *Corinne*, cartea care prevesteşte triunghiul amoros dintre protagonistă, Lucy şi Stephen prin Corinne, Nelvil şi Lucile. Când Maggie refuză să citească romanul *Corinne* integral, în sufletul ei erau deja încremenite cuvintele scriitorului german. Maggie îmbrăţişează o autodisciplină care îi zăvorăşte toate uşile către fericire, respectiv iubire. *Imitaţiunea lui Cristos* semnalează cel mai adânc destinul protagonistei – lupta înflăcărată cu pasiunea, care se împotriveşte simţului datoriei. Ce-i scapă, se pare, lui Maggie Tulliver, este asumarea unei identităţi masculine imaginare, prin lectură – citirea ficţiunii este plăcută şi pentru că „poate deveni scena unor schimbări imaginare de identitate, inclusiv schimbări de gen, de proiecţii sociale şi de măşti", chiar şi cititorii bărbaţi având acces la acest joc de tip „ca-şi-cum", care rezolvă problema relaţiei gen-lectură (Călinescu, 2003: 119). Viaţa lui Maggie nu s-a risipit zadarnic şi sterp – moartea de la finalul romanului nu vine să o desfiinţeze ca urmare a fatalităţii tragice, ci o eliberează, înlăturându-i primejdia de a deveni un cititor pasiv, literal al ofertelor viitoare de lectură.

Elemente de bovarism în *Middlemarch*

Numeroase asemănări livreşti reunesc două protagoniste ale romanelor secolului al XIX-lea – Emma Bovary şi Dorothea Brooke –, demersul investigativ centrându-se pe cea din urmă. Deşi romanul lui Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (1857) şi cel al lui George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) sunt foarte diferite la nivelul fluviului epic, aruncând o lumină penetrantă asupra epocii victoriene în Franţa şi în Anglia, când societatea nu mai trăieşte după un sistem unitar, eroinele lor citesc. Realitatea e privită prin prisma deformatoare a lecturilor sau a instanţelor scriitoriceşti văzute ca modele. Ambele femei aleg să dea crezare jocului de-a „ce-ar fi dacă" din cadrul ficţiunilor şi nu privesc textul literar din punct de vedere pragmatic. Când ficţiunea este luată drept realitate, însă, iar formulele ficţionalităţii (de tipul „A fost odată ca niciodată") ignorate, reacţia cititorului devine „inadecvată şi comică, precum în celebrul episod în care Don

Quixote intervine în spectacolul de marionete al meşterului Pedro ca să-i apere pe cei doi fugari, Don Gaiferos şi Señora Melisendra, de urmăritorii mauri" (Călinescu, 2003: 196). Viaţa celor două protagoniste e obligată să se supună unui tipar ficţional, lecturile lor dând naştere unor anumite aşteptări monstruoase în căsătorie. Proiecţia soţului ideal se oglindeşte în proza sentimentală pentru Emma sau în persoana scriitorilor clasici pentru Dorothea. Ambele sunt încadrate într-un tablou clinic al autodistrugerii prin intrarea în labirintul strâmt al căsătoriei, incompatibilitatea maritală distrugând misterul ce le potenţase lecturile. Pentru Dorothea, jurământul căsniciei e sacru; pentru Emma, adulterul e o opţiune. Structura lor lăuntrică diferă în mod vădit, căci frivolitatea Emmei nu o caracterizează pe Dorothea, tânăra independentă şi naivă care îşi propune să nu realizeze nimic extraordinar şi să se supună unui soţ superior din punct de vedere intelectual, pecetluindu-şi soarta astfel. Alege o persoană de vârstă mijlocie, un cleric de provincie învăţat – Edward Casaubon – renumit în ţinut pentru erudiţia lui şi pentru osteneala de a elabora, de mulţi ani, un mare tratat de istorie a religiilor. Cunoştinţele lui păreau a oglindi o lume întreagă, iar Dorothea nutrea speranţa că mariajul cu acesta ar descotorosi-o de robia ignoranţei hărăzite fetelor:

> Dorothea nutrea idei foarte copilăreşti despre căsătorie. Era încredinţată că i-ar fi acordat mâna ei înţeleptului Hooper, dacă s-ar fi născut la vreme pentru a-l izbăvi de nenorocita greşeală pe care o săvârşise în alegerea tovarăşei sale de viaţă; sau l-ar fi luat de soţ pe John Milton, de îndată ce şi-a pierdut lumina ochilor; sau pe oricare dintre oamenii mari ale căror apucături bizare nu pot fi îndurate decât dacă eşti înarmat cu o doză de glorioasă cucernicie. (Eliot, 1977: 8)

Aşa cum Emma se proiectează pe sine în intrigile siropoase pe care le citeşte, dorind să trăiască iubirea înrămată de cărţile de factură sentimentală, Dorothea este convinsă că, dacă i-ar încredinţa mâna ei unui înţelept precum Hooker sau Milton, i-ar putea îndura conduita bizară cu supunere, pentru un scop mai nobil. Acceptarea unei astfel de paternităţi demiurgice – căci soţul trebuia să îi fie un soi de părinte spiritual – ar iniţia-o în tainele cunoaşterii masculine, loja întregului adevăr văzut desluşit. Ceea ce le deosebeşte frapant pe cele două protagoniste rezidă în gusturile diferite pentru lectură. Emma e fascinată de literatura clişeică, de sertar, cu un apetit pentru kitsch care nu o scoate din mediocritate, afundând-o mai tare în trivial. Nici Dorothea nu reuşeşte a se „adăpa" din secretele unei minţi ilustre, căci Casaubon se dovedeşte a avea cunoştinţe limitate şi a nu fi receptiv la comentarii critice. Relaţia lor devine un pat procustian care o obligă pe Dorothea să graviteze în jurul lui chiar atunci când afecţiunea supusă din trecut păleşte. Protagonistele poartă insigna femeii înclinate spre dimensiuni epopeice, dar nu găsesc niciun debuşeu pentru reuşită în afara perimetrului căsniciei. Decizia de a se supune dorinţei egoiste de a termina, în locul lui Casaubon, tratatul savant – *Cheia tuturor mitologiilor* – ce se dorea a fi un Magnum opus în devenire, îi lărgeşte natura interioară cu preţul scump al independenţei. Dacă Emma citea facil, în baza unui mecanism leneş ce o duce la pierzanie, Dorothea reuşeşte să-l „citească" pe Will Ladislaw cu precizie, căsătorindu-se a doua oară cu un om cu care se putea angaja în conversaţii superioare, angrenate în corespondenţe şi oglindiri interioare. Adevărata cheie de lectură care i se descoperă este aceea că nu poate iubi, nici măcar cu inteligenţa, o fiinţă găunoasă.

Măiestrie oratorică şi vocaţie feminină în *Adam Bede*

Destinul metodistei Dinah Morris – personaj al romanului *Adam Bede* (1859), opusul „monştrilor" feminini temuţi ai epocii victoriene, concurează cu sistemul îngust al lumii patriarhale. Romanul aduce în schema epică fermieri englezi autentici, punând accent pe tensiunea religioasă dintre Biserica Anglicană şi denominaţia metodistă, dezvoltată începând cu secolul al XVIII-lea şi avându-l drept lider pe John Wesley. Ideea conform căreia o femeie ar fi putut fi chemată de Dumnezeu în slujba unei vocaţii clericale era în deplină contradicţie cu dogma fiecărei denominaţii. Aşadar, femeia care citeşte – purtătoarea tuturor hibelor – vine acum cu un mod propriu de interpretare a Scripturii şi nu mai savurează o literatură „de consum". Dinah se remarcă într-o lume a bărbaţilor prin Biblie, care o subjugă într-un fior reverenţios în faţa transcendenţei accesibile prin sacrificiu. Citind cărţile scrise de teologul John Wesley – pe care îl aduce adesea în discuţie în predicile sale – propovăduieşte importanţa ancorării în clipa de faţă. Deşi îi este recunoscătoare lui Seth Bede pentru iubirea pe care i-o poartă, femeia care a gustat din voluptatea ascetică a cititului şi din experienţa numinosului, a suprapământescului, nu-şi îngăduie să se însoţească cu un bărbat.

Universul semiologic care se deschide în faţa ei prin cărţile religioase o plasează într-o formă de isihasm concretizată în dorinţa de a răspândi dragoste şi a vorbi oamenilor despre felul în care Dumnezeu îşi dezvăluie iubirea faţă de creaturile sale. Cititul ca deprindere primară a culturii devine, în *Adam Bede*, un mod de a fi. Dinah adesea deschide Biblia ca să cerceteze care este voinţa divină, crezând în minuni, convertiri şi semne revelatorii. Chipul, purtarea şi vestimentaţia lui Dinah reflectă tomul bisericesc căruia îi slujeşte. Lipsa stângăciilor cu aer de cochetărie arată cum în existenţa livrescă a protagonistei se deapănă firele invizibile ale trăirilor sale. Lectura îi dă un rost particular: acela de a predica. Măiestria oratorică – câştigată, de asemenea, datorită lecturilor – e capabilă să câştige auditoriul în mod involuntar. Eliot ne aminteşte că „Dinah îi putea câştiga chiar şi pe cei mai nesimţitori dintre ascultători" (Eliot, 1977: 25). Dinah nu mai apelează, cum o face omul modern, la psihologie sau sociologie pentru a-i câştiga pe cei mai „nesimţitori", ci la forţa cuvântului rostit cu o pasiune mistuitoare pe altarul scripturilor şi al literelor.

La sfârşitul romanului, misiunea religioasă a personajului feminin se subordonează rolurilor de soţie şi de mamă, roluri circumscrise epocii în care trăieşte. Dragostea i-a fost dată femeii mistice Dinah Morris ca „suprema sa vocaţie şi, când o închină unui bărbat, în el îl caută pe Dumnezeu" (de Beauvoir, 2004: 450). Atât misiunea religioasă, cât şi cea familială, un alt „avânt spre transcendent" (450), însă, au la bază sacrificiul. Acest sacrificiu este „cel ce înscrie limbajul în corp, sensul în viaţă" (Clément; Kristeva, 2001: 23). Dinah dă viaţă (cuvintelor, altor membri ai comunităţii din Hayslope), legând generaţiile între ele; Hetty Sorrel înfăptuieşte „sacrilegiul răvăşirii generaţiilor", repetând gestul marilor eroine infanticide din Grecia antică, curmând „în mod sălbatic şirul generaţiilor" – „Medeea şi-a înjunghiat cei doi copii, bacanta Agave şi-a sfâşiat fiul cu propriile mâini în delirul ei dionisiac" (92). Cititorul extern, cântărind balanţa înţelesurilor textuale, hotărăşte, în definitiv, dacă finalul romanului *Adam Bede* redă un convenţional *happy ending*, o reîntoarcere la rutina de zi cu zi, a comunităţii întregi, pe care paradoxalul *felix culpa* (căderea binecuvântată) a ajutat-o să se restabilească mai ferm după şocul produs de Hetty Sorrel, Arthur Dornnithorne şi legătura lor ilicită. La polul opus se situează tensiunea dintre sacralitatea căsătoriei şi sacralitatea vocaţiei femeii.

Concluzii

Creaturile-biblioteci care au populat paginile romanelor discutate anterior – *La răscruce de vînturi*, *Moara de pe Floss*, *Middlemarch* şi *Adam Bede* – şi cele din umbra lor pledează pentru o existenţă livrescă capabilă să împrumute din frenezia spirituală insuflată de lectură, în ciuda conservatorismului epocii victoriene. Personajele feminine permit lecturilor să lucreze prin ele. Romancierele împrumută eroinelor propriul lor nonconformism pentru a reacţiona la nedreptăţile societăţii ostile ce condamnă tipul de feminitate care se opune unor convenţii rigide sau îndrăzneşte a păşi pe teren intelectual masculin. Actul lecturii devine procedeu de reconstrucţie narativă şi de reinterpretare a fiinţelor de hârtie. Personajele analizate anterior facilitează trecerea de la simpla lectură a textului la raportarea critică faţă de acesta, care va fi iniţiată ferm abia în secolul XX. Intelectualitatea feminină a căpătat valenţe monstruoase şi a cunoscut dezaprobare mai ales într-un timp în care mişcarea sufragetelor a câştigat teren în Anglia. Înaintând cu paşi mărunţi în epocă, femeile au câştigat, în cele din urmă, dreptul de a deţine proprietate, au militat pentru dreptul de vot şi s-au cufundat din ce în ce mai mult în lectură, demitizând temerile unei societăţi aride. Controversele care au învăluit lectura practicată de femei, asemenea Monstrului inteligent din scrierile lui Mary Shelley, s-au domolit, astâmpărându-se nevoit, însă nu s-au risipit, bântuind cu dibăcie cultura populară. Cei care privesc cu scepticism femeile cititoare, în forma lor de strigoi culturali, păstrează aceleaşi hâde apucături şi vechi metehne – sunt la fel de aprigi, banuitori şi războinici ca altădată. Obstacolele pe care le-au înfruntat tovarăşele victoriene se află în contrast cu privilegiile femeii secolului XXI, care priveşte lectura ca pe o gratuitate lejer achiziţionată. În prezent, însă, aşa cum mărturiseşte Alberto Manguel în *Istoria lecturii* (2011), librăriile noastre găzduiesc „nu doar cărţile destinate femeilor din raţiuni comerciale, determinând şi limitând aria unei cititoare, dar şi pe cele care îşi au originea în interiorul grupului, în care femeile scriu pentru ele însele ceea ce lipseşte din textele oficiale (275). Această ultimă observaţie clarifică sarcina cititoarei contemporane – să devoreze, fără cenzură, cărţile pe care şansa şi experienţa le-au aşezat în biblioteca sa.

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The Vampiric Mother in Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire"

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Keywords

Sherlock Holmes; vampire; motherhood; postcolonialism; abjection; Gothic.

The current paper intends to discuss the figure of the 'vampiric' mother in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire", in which a young woman is suspected and accused of sucking the blood of her young infant. When Holmes is sent to investigate, he discovers that the mother is innocent of the charge and was, in fact, only trying to protect her baby, but the horror and abjection of the mother figure devouring her child supersedes the horror of the vampire. The paper argues that motherhood equals, multiplies and even replaces the monstrosity of the vampire. In spite of the mother's ultimate innocence, her status as foreigner and Other (both female and Peruvian) marks her as an indeterminate threat. In order to explain the marginality and peril of the foreign mother, the paper will also turn to postcolonial theories, relating them to theories of gender, race and motherhood.

The vampire as a cultural figure has always encapsulated the anxieties of his age, mirroring not only human concerns, but the human being itself (Groom, 2018: 13). The construction of the vampire has been "profoundly shadowed by changes in the definition of the human" (13). As such, the history of the vampire is the history of the human, of trying to understand the human being, the vampire being a useful "tool" in such endeavors (13).

As a cultural export, the vampire has usually traveled east to west. Interestingly, in Eastern European folklore, where the myth originated, the creature was not so much supernatural as an "extreme natural phenomenon" (72), a flesh-and-blood reality that also consumed flesh and blood. The vampire could be catalogued as a diseased body that was contagious to others, much like its counterpart, the bat (72). The belief in its tangible corporality was due to the corroborated cases of corpses rising from their graves in certain parts of the Balkans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (73-74). On the threshold of the Enlightenment, such disturbing occurrences provided opportunities for scientific and forensic investigations of the body, and empirical methods such as the post-mortem became less controversial in time (74). But the 'vampire's spread across Europe culminated in the nineteenth century, when, having landed on western shores, he became a Gothic and Romantic symbol, in part due to the "necrophiliac imagination of the period" (139). Writers and artists were experimenting with the limits of imagination, while also inserting more subjectivity in their works. The vampires of John William Polidori and Lord Byron, for example, were "dandy" gentlemen who mirrored their creators (Williamson, 2003: 102). There was a newfound proximity between

human and vampire. Most of the literary vampires of the period, as Nina Auerbach puts it, "were indeterminate creatures who flourished not in their difference from their human prey, but through their intimate intercourse with mortals, to whom they were dangerously close (1997: 13).

Teetering between sublimity and abjection, desire and repulsion, the vampire was a temptation that disturbed notions of selfhood. Connecting questions of identity and monstrosity (who or what is the monster?), he was a reminder of the perpetuity of the past, haunting the present (Groom, 2018: 139-140), but he was also a herald of the future. The Romantic Age responded eagerly to the fantastic aspect of the vampire, yet the creature still exercised a scientific fascination, both as a medical and natural mystery, particularly because the nineteenth century had upended many religious and philosophical certainties regarding (human) nature (140). The vampire gained reality, while reality itself lost credibility. This is why Bram Stoker's *Dracula* makes the infamous Count seem like a believable entity, taking part in the culture and economy of English society. The novel unites various fields of crime, forensics, and medicine, while also rooting the creature in a Gothic tradition; Dracula is both mythological and social, he is the culmination of the century's preoccupation with science, money, degeneracy, illness, sexuality, and identity (206).

That being said, the vampire as a category becomes far more diffuse when the modifier "female" is attached before it. A female vampire poses slightly different questions. What is a female predator? What sort of danger does she present? What is her allure? Nineteenth-century literature was rife with female vampires, as they, in fact, predominated in number (175). To the Romantics, the 'vampiress' was a seductress of men whose lethal charm led to their downfall, even when she had no direct hand in it. Edgar Allan Poe's gothic universe, for example, includes many dead or dying childlike brides who drain the lives of others (Holte, 1999: 164). But the nineteenth-century female vampire, first and foremost, threatened the wholeness and purity of the institutions associated with woman, such as marriage and virginity (Groom, 2018: 175). Though she partook in the seduction of men, the female vampire was a bigger menace to the innocence of young women through the power of corruption and contamination. Both Lady Geraldine in Coleridge's *Christabel* and Carmilla in Sheridan Le Fanu's eponymous novel tempt young women to stray from their path and become fallen women, like them. Christabel even utters a desperate "Mary mother, save me now!" (2006: 20), invoking the name of another female immortal at the sight of the beautiful Geraldine, but she still disrobes and joins the strange lady in bed. Similarly, Laura first feels Carmilla's sting in her bedroom, on her breast:

> She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed. (Le Fanu, 2020: 9)

Carmilla's infiltration of the young woman's bed is disturbing because it is gentle and "soothing", combining sisterly and motherly attention with consumption, the breast acting as a metonym for both innocence and carnality. Indeed, Carmilla is both "adorable and abhorrent" (Groom, 2018: 182). The female vampire's form of seduction combines virginity and sexuality

in a much yearned for and unachievable fantasy. Keats' *Lamia*, for example, seems both the "penanced lady elf" and "the demon's self" (1998: 194).

Keats was inspired by one of the female vampire's first mythological sources, the lamia, the other being the Biblical Lilith. Both Lilith and Lamia have serpentine qualities and are connected to the figure of the serpent. Lilith, as the first wife of Adam in the Apocryphal Judeo-Christian texts, took the form of a snake, at Satan's behest, in order to tempt Eve, Adam's second wife (Brode, 2014: 4). Lamia's lower half, on the other hand, would take on a serpentine appearance during her seduction of men. In Greek mythology, Lamia, Queen of Lybia, had an affair with Zeus, for which she was punished by Hera, who destroyed any child of hers, driving Lamia to madness and despair. Her vengeance was fulfilled in the devouring of both children and men, and her appearance became monstrous and snake-like. Zeus endowed her with powers of transformation and prophecy, not out of pity, but because Lamia's attraction lay in her vengeful trap; men were drawn to her destructive lovemaking, out of a desire to "fall" (2). The shadowy figures of Lilith and Lamia were, therefore, early incarnations of "female vampire as the natural enemy of domesticity, sought by the patriarch for her forbidden allure, likely to 'swallow up' any man whole" (2).

If the female vampire is more snake-like, so is her bite. In old religions, the snake's ability to encircle its tail led some cultures to associate it with the moon and further connect it with the female and the menstrual cycle (4). As such, the punctures left by a female vampire remind one of the snake, rather than the bat (4). The correlations made between menstrual blood, the serpentine 'vampiress' and the Biblical temptation to "fall" are not incidental: women have always been marked as more sinful and 'monstrous' by their very nature, as they are "formed in the image of the vampire" (Groom, 2018: 187). By this logic, not all men could be vampires, but all women have the demonic potential inside them. Particularly in the nineteenth century, when the figure of the vampire reached new heights, the image of woman was often likened to a beast, be it cat or snake (187). Thus, while male vampires were viewed as "roving thought-experiments lingering on the periphery of comprehension" (13), female vampires embodied a periphery of miscomprehension, where the modifier "female" was just as monstrous as "vampire".

What is noteworthy about the figure of Lamia (and its later literary counterpart, Medea, who, incidentally, was often portrayed as priestess to the serpent-like Hecate, patron goddess over the moon and witchcraft) is not only her sexual dominance over men, but her drive to destroy and devour children. It is the relationship between the female vampire and the child that will concern the rest of this paper in the analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" (1924).

In the "Sussex Vampire", the already well-established detective is assigned to solve a case whose explanation seems to be supernatural. Holmes receives a letter about an extremely bizarre family situation where a young mother has been witnessed sucking the blood of her young infant. The letter describes one such scene: "A loud cry from the baby, as of pain, called the nurse back. As she ran into the room she saw her employer, the lady, leaning over the baby, and apparently biting his neck. There was a small wound in the neck, from which a stream of blood had escaped" (Doyle, 2016: 259). The nurse is "horrified" and so is the young woman's husband who, though at first rejecting the possibility, witnesses his wife's deviant behavior firsthand: "With a cry of horror, he turned his wife's face to the light and saw blood all around her lips. It was she – she beyond all question – who had drunk the poor baby's blood" (260).

Though the case seems rather disturbing, Holmes finds it more ridiculous than strange, especially when the notion of "vampirism" is brought up. The detective is quite amused by the letter, telling Dr. Watson: "For a mixture of the modern and the medieval, of the practical and of the wildly fanciful, I think this is surely the limit" (255). Through Sherlock Holmes, Doyle is both critiquing and mocking the sensationalist literature of the late Victorian and Edwardian period that was fascinated by the figure of the vampire. Holmes, as the reasoning detective, must unmask the ruse, using his science of deduction. Yet, Holmes also appears to be irritated that he has to lend his skills to such "supernatural" tall-tales: "but really we seem to have been switched on to a Grimms' fairy tale" (256). It is not just the case itself, but the infiltration of a whole other genre upon the detective story that leaves Holmes feeling "displaced" (Smajic, 2010: 3) because the supernatural is not supposed to "insinuate itself" into a story about logic and reason (3). Holmes's exclamation of "Rubbish, Watson, rubbish!" (Doyle, 2016: 257) comes at the beginning of the story, already informing the reader that he should not expect Holmes to be wrong in this assertion. Indeed, the detective underlines that "the world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply" (257). And yet, the true horror of the case does not stem from a supernatural component; after all, a woman does not need to be a literal vampire to bite her child and suck its blood. In fact, that is precisely the problem and the solution to the story: the woman is indeed only mortal and has good reasons for trying to suck her infant's blood, but until we are told those reasons at the end of the story, the source of disturbance remains the image of the mother's lips, red with her child's blood.

In his letter to Holmes, Robert Ferguson, the beleaguered husband, confesses that he knows little of "Vampirism" and that he thought "it was some wild tale of foreign parts" (260). Indeed, when Holmes looks through his famous index of cases, the entry for "vampire" leads him to Hungary and Transylvania (256). Such supernatural occurrences have no place on English soil, or at least, they should only appear in fanciful stories. Much like in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, it is the *location* of the vampire that is unsettling; the fact that such a "foreign" creature may be found in the heart of London is almost as disturbing as its existence. Dracula's infiltration of the city through the purchase of houses with the goal of spreading vampirism is seen by Stephen Arata as a form of "reverse colonization", where "the 'civilized' world is on the point of being overrun by 'primitive forces" (1996: 108). Likewise, the presence of a vampire in the traditionally English county of Sussex strikes one as both eerie and absurd. London, at least, is a multinational metropolis, the hub of the Empire, but Sussex is not the usual setting for a Gothic tale. Indeed, Mr. Ferguson writes in his letter, almost overcome with disbelief: "And yet here in the very heart of the English Sussex –" (Doyle, 2016: 260). Doyle's choice of location hints at the ridiculousness of such a possibility and reinforces Holmes' perspective on the matter.

Ironically, vampirism is less foreign to England than Ferguson's wife who is a "Peruvian lady, the daughter of a Peruvian merchant" that the husband had met "in connection with the importation of nitrates" (258). Ferguson procured his wife as part of his commercial relations with South America. Here one may dwell on the mention of "nitrates" which are usually found in fertilizers, and the ironic echo of Dracula's boxes full of native soil. Yet of more interest is the fact that Mr. Ferguson has a difficult time relating to his strange, foreign wife:

> The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their

> union as a mistake. He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore of understand. This was the more painful, as she was as loving a wife as a man could have – to all appearance absolutely devoted. (258)

In spite of the wife's loving behavior, her husband feels there is something about her that escapes comprehension, a distance that cannot be bridged. Indeed, even at the story's conclusion, when the lady is absolved of her crime, we may wonder if her "foreign birth" and her "alien religion" will maintain that separation. Ferguson's wife is doubly strange, being both a foreigner and a woman. When her husband reflects: "And yet, the kiddies have got to be protected. Is it madness, Mr. Holmes? Is it something in the blood?" (262), he is considering both race and gender. Madness or hysteria was often the diagnostic given to a deviant female constitution and the Sussex vampiress is locked up in her room in a similar fashion to the female patient in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). At the same time, her possibly 'tainted' blood is related to her foreign origins. When asked if his wife has a jealous nature, Ferguson replies "jealous with all the strength of her fiery tropical love" (265) which hints at her disease (vampirism) being related to her South American ethnicity.

South American "utensils and weapons" also hang on the walls of Ferguson's old farmhouse, having been brought over "by the Peruvian lady upstairs" (267). This implicates the mother in the crime, in spite of her innocence. Holmes ultimately reveals to the husband that his wife had been trying to save their baby by sucking poison from his neck. It turns out that Ferguson's son from his previous marriage had been trying to poison the baby out of jealousy, and the instrument he used was one of the South American "utensils" on display (namely, a poisoned arrow). Therefore, despite her honorable intentions, the foreign mother is still linked with the means of killing. It was an English boy who tries to harm the child, but it was she who brought the poisoned arrow in the household.

The lasting threat that the wife represents, in spite of her innocence, speaks to the constant anxiety in late Victorianism due to "England's increasingly intimate contact with the peoples and cultures on the peripheries of the Empire" (Harris, 2003: 448). Such people were believed to have "potentially harmful effects on metropolitan culture" (448). Sherlock Holmes was meant to assuage their fears, using his authority not only to debunk the myth of vampirism, but to also carefully defuse the potentially dangerous foreigner. Though accompanied by Dr. Watson, Holmes' actions parallel that of a doctor "in that he diagnoses, contains, and neutralizes the noxious agents he investigates" (447), be them substances or people. Ferguson's wife, though ultimately good, cannot be entirely neutralized. She cannot get rid of her Otherness and, ultimately, cannot remove the shadow of the vampire, either. When her husband first arrives to see Holmes in Baker Street, his old friend Watson can barely recognize him because he looks weakened and drained: "There is surely nothing in life more painful than to meet the wreck of a fine athlete whom one has known in his prime. His great frame had fallen in, his flaxen hair was scanty, and his shoulders were bowed" (Doyle, 2016: 262). We can infer that his wife is depleting him of life, sucking out his strength and vigor, as a vampire would. The Irish-Scottish family name of "Ferguson" comes from the Old Irish roots of "fer" (man) and "guss" (vigor, strength, force). Thus, "Ferguson" literally means 'the son of the man of strength'. Mrs. Ferguson is endangering that male strength and vigor; she is a vampiric creature on the "periphery of Empire", draining it of its might.

If we return for a moment to the concept of "reverse colonization" observed by Stephen Arata in *Dracula* and apply it here, we may notice a difference in agency; Dracula's infiltration is

intentional, but Ferguson's wife does not mean to corrupt and overturn the hierarchy, she simply wants to be a dutiful, loving wife. That is why she does not tell her husband about his son's guilt, because she is willing to sacrifice herself "rather than break his dear heart" (270). As a mother, Ferguson's wife is a more disturbing 'vampire', because her infiltration is much more intimate and passive. She seduces through her nurturing and loving behavior, she drains the vigor of manhood through her motherly sacrifices.

Motherhood has always been rife with contradictions and complications. The birthing act is both repulsive and sublime, and there is a certain supernatural liminality about the state of the fetus as it passes "from inside to outside, bringing with it traces of its contamination – blood, afterbirth, faeces" (Creed, 2007: 190). Though the mother gives new life, she forever conditions her creation to yearn for the womb and the pre-human; as Julia Kristeva writes, the maternal is a "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God, and, consequently defying metaphysics" (1981: 16). The vampiric mother is then almost a tautology; the mother as vampire is only a repetition and a reinforcement of the contaminating monster – she who is "anterior to the One, to God".

The nameless and "unnameable" mother in the Holmesian story remains vampiric through her child, as well. She has given birth to an infant who, though an English subject, has managed to combine the best features of both 'races', as we are told that he is "a beautiful child, dark-eyed, golden-haired, a wonderful mixture of the Saxon and the Latin" (Doyle, 2016: 271). The child has borrowed his mother's uncanny essence, but he will manage to infiltrate better, seeing as he has assimilated both the human and 'Other'. It is interesting to note Dr. Watson's observation at the beginning of the story, when he brings up the custom of drinking blood for vitality: "'But surely, said I, 'the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? A living person might have the habit. I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth'" (257). In that sense, we may wonder who is drinking whom. The mother was willing to sacrifice herself, not only for her half-English child, but for her husband and his older son as well; meanwhile, it is the "old", or rather, the English who are sucking the blood of the younger nations on the periphery in order to keep the Empire alive. The Empire itself is then a vampiric mother, draining and being drained by its satellites.

There is something particularly disturbing about a woman's embrace turning out to be lethal. Edvard Munch's painting *Love and Pain* (1983-95) shows a woman kissing and embracing a man while her vividly red hair spills over his body, and there are hints in the woman's powerful stance that she is not merely doting on the man, but something more sinister is afoot (Groom, 2018: 41). The maternal figure goes hand in hand with the vampire, the succubus, the giver and taker of life. The monstrosity of the vampiric mother lies in her nurturing womanhood, which is both a weapon and a form of grace.

This paper has attempted to show how the vampiric mother disturbs, multiplies and even replaces the monstrosity of the supernatural, particularly in the shape of a racial and ethnic Other. The threat of the vampire's infiltration and domination at the end of the nineteenth century finds echo in Arthur Conan Doyle's story. Though Sherlock Holmes mocks and minimizes this threat for the sake of its audience, the "Sussex vampire" remains a disturbing agent in Ferguson's household, as his Peruvian wife will continue, in her alterity and Otherness, to exercise a certain vampiric power over him and his children.

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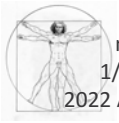

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Le monstre dans *Thérèse Raquin* d'Emile Zola : Représentations et esthétique

The Monster in Emile Zola's Thérèse Raquin: Representations and Aesthetics

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Mots-clés

Thérèse Raquin ; Emile Zola ; monstre ; espace ; corps ; caractère ; esthétique.

La lecture de *Thérèse Raquin*, roman de jeunesse qui a constitué un tournant décisif dans la carrière romanesque d'Emile Zola, étonne par l'omniprésence de la question de la monstruosité et de l'emploi polysémique du mot « monstre », décelant par là la volonté zolienne d'exploiter toute la richesse du vocabulaire et son refus de se confiner dans une définition figée et restreinte. L'auteur emploie en effet le mot « monstre » dans une multitude de sens qui renvoie à l'idée de la laideur architecturale, de l'infirmité corporelle, de la fourberie comportementale, mettant ainsi en relief cette transgression de la loi morale et sociale. Cette œuvre frappe également par cette dialectique saisissante du laid et du beau. Notre article se proposerait donc d'étudier les différentes déclinaisons du monstre rattachées à l'espace, aux corps et aux caractères ainsi que le rapport qu'il pourrait entretenir avec l'esthétique et, en particulier, avec l'idée du beau et de l'attirant.

Keywords

Thérèse Raquin; Émile Zola; monster; space; body; character; aesthetics.

Thérèse Raquin, a novel of youth which constituted a decisive turning point in the romantic career of Émile Zola, surprises its reader by the omnipresence of the question of monstrosity and the polysemic use of the word "monster", thereby revealing Zola's will to exploit all the richness of the vocabulary and his refusal to confine the term to a fixed and restricted definition. The author uses the word "monster" in a multitude of senses, referring to architectural ugliness, bodily infirmity, behavioral deceit, in order to highlight the transgression of moral and social law. The novel is also striking by its dialectic of the ugly and the beautiful. Our article is therefore aiming to study the monster varieties related to space, bodies and characters in *Thérèse Raquin*, with some attention provided to the aesthetics of the monstrous.

Le monstre, terme à la fois générique et polymorphe, a toujours fait l'objet de différentes et multiples tentatives de définitions si bien que « pour effrayant que soit un monstre, la tâche de le décrire est toujours un peu plus effrayante que lui » (Valéry, 1957 : 490). Qu'est-ce qu'un monstre ? *Le Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e^ siècle* de Larousse en donne une définition exhaustive qui révèle tout à la fois la richesse et la difficulté définitoire rattachées à ce terme. En effet, figurant au volume 11, paru en 1874, le mot masculin *monstre*, issu du latin *monēre* (« avertir », « mettre en garde »), acquiert une multitude de sens. Il désigne un être fantastique qui figure dans la légende ou dans la mythologie, un être vivant présentant une importante malformation, un animal effrayant par sa taille et son aspect, un objet ou une machine épouvantables par leur forme énorme, une personne d'une laideur repoussante, un objet en dehors de toute règle, une personne qui suscite l'horreur par sa cruauté, sa perversité ou par quelque vice énorme, une chose qu'on se représente comme extrêmement difficile, qu'on s'exagère infiniment, pour ne citer que ces désignations qui suffisent à montrer la large polysémie du terme « monstre » dans la langue française du XIX^e^ siècle. À lire l'œuvre d'Émile Zola, romancier naturaliste qui a profondément marqué son siècle, l'on constate que presque tous les sens du mot « monstre » s'y trouvent, décelant par là la volonté zolienne d'exploiter toute la richesse du vocabulaire et son refus de se confiner dans une définition figée et restreinte. L'auteur emploie en effet le mot « monstre » dans une multitude de sens. Il suffit de rappeler les nœuds monstrueux parce qu'imposants dans la *Fortune* des Rougon Macquart, la bête d'Orléans présentée comme un monstre en raison de son aspect fantastique dans *La Terre,* l'enfant monstre né d'une union entre Serge et Albine dans *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, l'homosexualité féminine qualifiée de monstrueuse dans *Nana*, les Paloques monstrueux car trop laids dans *La Conquête de Plassans*, entre autres. Ce bref repérage permet ainsi de relever la grande richesse polysémique dont profite Zola dans l'emploi du mot « monstre ». Mais nous avons choisi, dans le cadre du présent travail, de nous focaliser essentiellement sur l'œuvre de jeunesse d'Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, écrite en 1867, marquant alors un tournant décisif dans la carrière romanesque du jeune auteur, pour ausculter les différentes représentations du monstre et montrer le rapport qu'il pourrait entretenir avec l'esthétique.

À lire *Thérèse Raquin*, un constat s'impose. Le monstre hante le texte zolien et prend plusieurs visages : lieux-monstres, corps-monstres, caractères-monstres. En effet, dès l'entrée dans l'histoire, le lecteur se sent étonné par la spécificité des lieux parisiens dépeints par l'auteur, marqués par la prédominance d'un aspect bien particulier, à savoir la clôture. En effet, la description spatiale dans *Thérèse Raquin* laisse apercevoir des lieux fermés, marqués par la multiplication des signes de clôture, horizontaux comme verticaux. Le passage du Pont-Neuf, ce lieu architectural typique des années 1830, se présente comme « un corridor étroit et sombre » (Zola, 1971 : 25), fermé, d'un côté, par une muraille et de l'autre par un vitrage : « A droite, sur toute la longueur du passage, s'étend une muraille contre laquelle les boutiquiers d'en face ont plaqué d'étroites armoires » (Zola, 1971 : 26).

En outre, cet effet d'enfermement semble accentué par la faible lumière du soleil qui plonge le passage dans l'obscurité, le laissant ainsi apparaître comme une « galerie souterraine » et le dotant d'un « aspect sinistre d'un véritable coupe-gorge » (Zola, 1971 : 28). Les boutiques, faisant corps avec ce corridor, subissent à leur tour la pesanteur de la clôture. Ces magasins qui, devant être normalement distingués par leur potentiel d'accueil et d'ouverture, apparaissent étriqués laissent répandre une sensation de froid, causée à la fois par le manque de lumière et la présence de l'humidité : « au-delà, derrière les étalages, les boutiques pleines de ténèbres sont autant de trous lugubres dans lesquels s'agitent des formes bizarres » (Zola, 1971 : 26).

D'ailleurs, on peut relever sans grande difficulté des termes appartenant au champ lexical de la fosse : « au fond », « trous », « se creusent », « funéraires », « trouent », « s'enfonçaient » (Zola, 1971 : 26-27-28), etc. La boutique des Raquin n'échappe pas, elle non plus, à la fermeture. Celle-ci, plus longue que profonde, est dotée d'objets de petites dimensions : à l'un des bouts, se trouve « un petit comptoir » et de l'autre bout, apparaît « un escalier en forme de vis » (Zola, 1971 : 30). Cette mercerie donne l'impression que tout y est serré, à l'étroit : « des vitrines plaquées contre les murs », « des marchandises empaquetées, serrées dans des coins », « une vitrine de haut en bas emplie de loques blanchâtres », « une vitrine plus étroite (où) s'étagent un entassement d'objets » (Zola, 1971 : 29-30-31). L'auteur, pour rendre plus frappant cet effet de clôture, ajoute à ce cadre extérieur, composé du passage et de boutiques, l'aspect de l'abandon. La galerie du Pont-Neuf apparaît mal entretenue du sol au vitrage : les dalles sont gluantes, le vitrage est « noir de crasse », les boutiques sont couvertes de couches de saleté accumulées, la muraille est « noire, grossièrement crépie, comme couverte d'une lèpre et toute couturée de cicatrices » (Zola, 1971 : 26). En témoigne la présence du champ lexical de la souillure et du délaissement : « dalles jaunâtres, usées, descellées », « vitres sales », « étalages gris de poussière », « des marchandises oubliées là depuis vingt ans », « un entassement d'objets ternes et fanés qui dormaient sans doute en cet endroit depuis cinq ou six ans », « toutes les teintes avaient tourné au gris sale, dans cette armoire que la poussière et l'humidité pourrissaient » (Zola, 1971 : 25-26), etc. Le confinement n'épargne pas non plus leur appartement. Toutes les pièces, de par leur étroitesse, ont une odeur de cloître. Cet aspect de cloisonnement est rendu encore plus difficile à supporter en raison du délabrement et du manque du mobilier : « Elle […] monta au premier étage, fit le tour de chaque pièce ; ces pièces nues, sans meubles, étaient effrayantes de solitude et de délabrement » (Zola, 1971 : 41).

C'est ainsi que Zola semble se plaire à multiplier les signes matériels de la fermeture, comme les murs, les cloisons, les vitrages, les murailles, etc. Cet engouement zolien pour le clos a été très justement remarqué par Colette Becker : « Zola enferme le plus souvent ses personnages dans un univers étroit, écrasant, hostile dans lequel il leur faut, au risque de périr, faire "leur trou" » (1990 : 95). Ainsi, clôture et étroitesse semblent donner la sensation d'oppression et de frayeur au lecteur comme au personnage éponyme Thérèse, dont l'entrée première dans la boutique de sa tante Madame Raquin est loin d'être euphorique. Ce fonds de commerce, « plus long que profond » (Zola, 1971 : 30), plonge la jeune femme dans un état de dégoût profond et lui donne une sensation de vertige et d'étouffement. Elle paraît ainsi blasée, ahurie et profondément déçue par ce nouveau cadre dans lequel elle va dorénavant vivre :

> Quand Thérèse entra pour la première fois dans la boutique où elle allait vivre désormais, il lui sembla qu'elle descendait dans la terre grasse d'une fosse. Une sorte d'écœurement la prit à la gorge, elle eut des frissons de peur. (Zola, 1971 : 41)

L'exploration de l'appartement, réalisée ensuite dans le but d'apaiser ce sentiment de malaise et de dégoût ressenti par la jeune femme, ne fait que l'effrayer davantage :

> Elle […] monta au premier étage, fit le tour de chaque pièce ; ces pièces nues, sans meubles, étaient effrayantes de solitude et de délabrement. […] La jeune femme ne trouva pas un geste, ne prononça pas une parole. Elle était comme glacée. Sa tante et son mari étant descendus, elle s'assit sur une malle, les mains roides, la gorge pleine de sanglots, ne pouvant pleurer ». (Zola, 1971 : 41)

L'état de Thérèse s'apparente, pour ainsi dire, « au choc noir », expression empruntée à Gilbert Durant. Sans doute, le lieu monstrueux de par sa laideur, son étroitesse et son délabrement, où Zola a choisi d'assigner à résidence son héroïne, semble provoquer chez cette dernière, dont l'espérance se veut détrompée, « un choc émotif pouvant aller jusqu'à la crise nerveuse »[1] (Durant, 1960 : 98). N'est-il pas vrai qu'elle se trouve très souvent en proie à des hallucinations qui la tenaillent depuis son séjour au passage du Pont-Neuf ?

> […] parfois des hallucinations la prenaient, elle se croyait enfouie au fond d'un caveau […]. L'air épais de la salle à manger l'étouffait ; le silence frissonnant, les lueurs jaunâtres de la lampe la pénétraient d'un vague effroi, d'une angoisse inexprimable. (Zola, 1971 : 58)

La mansarde du personnage masculin, Laurent, essentiellement marquée par son état sordide, miséreux et étriqué, lui apparaît comme un véritable supplice. C'est pourquoi le jeune homme préfère traîner toute la journée sur les quais et dans les jardins, ne regagnant ainsi sa cachette qu'à la tombée de la nuit.

> Il habitait rue Saint-Victor, en face du Port aux Vins, un petit cabinet meublé qu'il payait dix-huit francs par mois ; ce cabinet, mansardé, troué en haut d'une fenêtre à tabatière, qui s'entrebâillait étroitement sur le ciel, avait à peine six mètres carrés. Laurent rentre le plus tard possible dans ce galetas. (Zola, 1971 : 54-55)

La morgue que Laurent fréquente maintes fois pour s'assurer de la mort certaine de sa victime est à son tour décrite comme un lieu-monstre, qui répugne non par son aspect étriqué mais plutôt par l'odeur fade et puante qui s'y propage, le spectacle cadavérique qui s'y dessine, et par les chairs affreusement dissoutes sur les dalles de la salle. Les visites à la morgue envahissent, à vrai dire, le personnage masculin de terreur et de dégoût qu'il a toujours du mal à contenir.

> Laurent se donna la tâche de passer chaque matin par la Morgue, en se rendant à son bureau. […] Lorsqu'il entrait, une odeur fade, une odeur de chair lavée l'écœurait, et des souffles froids couraient sur sa peau ; l'humidité des murs semblait alourdir ses vêtements, qui devenaient plus pesants à ses épaules. Il allait droit au vitrage qui sépare les spectateurs des cadavres : il collait sa face pâle contre les vitres, il regardait. Devant lui, s'alignaient les rangées de dalles grises. Çà et là, sur les dalles, des corps nus faisaient des taches vertes et jaunes, blanches et rouges ; certains corps gardaient leurs chairs vierges dans la rigidité de la mort ; d'autres semblaient des tas de viandes sanglantes et pourries. […] quand il y avait plusieurs cadavres gonflés et bleuis par l'eau, il les regardait avidement, cherchant à reconnaître Camille. Souvent les chairs de leur visage s'en allaient par lambeaux, les os avaient troué la peau amollie, la face était comme bouillie et désossée. […] Ses visites à la morgue l'emplissaient de cauchemars, de frissons qui le faisaient haleter. Il secouait ses peurs, il se traitait d'enfant, il voulait être fort ; mais, malgré lui, sa chair se révoltait, le dégoût et l'effroi s'emparaient de son être, dès qu'il se trouvait dans l'humidité et l'odeur fade de la salle. (Zola, 1971 : 101-102)

De cette manière, la caractérisation du monstre et du monstrueux s'applique parfaitement aux lieux dépeints par Zola dans l'œuvre, lieux dont la forme et l'architecture étonnent, frappent l'œil et font naître chez ceux qui les visitent ou habitent un sentiment de répugnance, de malaise et d'effroi.

Chez Zola, le monstre n'étonne pas uniquement par sa nature et sa vue, mais aussi par la difformité des parties constitutives du corps, comme celui de la tante Raquin, ou bien dans le déplacement d'un état à un autre, comme le donne à voir le personnage de Camille, ce mort-vivant. En effet, madame Raquin, tante de Thérèse et vieille mercière, se trouve, après la mort de son fils, « frappée de mutisme et d'immobilité » (Zola, 1971 : 182). La crise qui guette et menace la vieille dame déclare brusquement et cruellement sa présence. La paralysie engourdit petit à petit ses membres jusqu'à roidir sa langue et tordre son corps entier. Cette impotence se vit alors comme un coup de foudre :

> La crise dont madame Raquin était menacée se déclara. Brusquement, la paralysie, qui depuis plusieurs mois rampait le long de ses membres, toujours près de l'étreindre, la prit à la gorge et lui lia le corps. Un soir, comme elle s'entretenait paisiblement avec Thérèse et Laurent, elle resta au milieu d'une phrase, la bouche béante : il lui semblait qu'on l'étranglait. Quand elle voulut crier, appeler au secours, elle ne put balbutier que des sons rauques. Sa langue est devenue de pierre. Ses mains et ses pieds s'étaient roidis. Elle se trouvait frappée de mutisme et d'immobilité. Thérèse et Laurent se levèrent, effrayés devant ce coup de foudre, qui tordit la vieille mercière en moins de cinq secondes. Quand elle fut roide et qu'elle fixa sur eux des regards suppliants, ils la pressèrent de questions pour connaître la cause de sa souffrance. Elle ne put répondre, elle continua à les regarder avec une angoisse profonde. Ils comprirent alors qu'ils n'avaient plus qu'un cadavre devant eux, un cadavre vivant à moitié qui les voyait et les entendait, mais qui ne pouvait leur parler. Cette crise les désespéra ; […] (Zola, 1971 : 182)

Le corps-monstre de la vieille mercière continue à exercer un sentiment de monstruosité et d'effroi sur celui qui le regarde. D'ailleurs, les deux époux, Thérèse et Laurent, ne peuvent pas s'empêcher de ressentir de la terreur devant le spectacle insoutenable de l'infirmité de madame Raquin, sans vouloir pourtant la fuir car sa présence leur est nécessaire : ils la considèrent comme une distraction utile qui les tire de leurs mauvais rêves et les protège contre la présence spectrale du mari qu'ils ont assassiné, Camille.

> Ils plaçaient toujours la vieille impotente sous la clarté crue de la lampe, afin de bien éclairer son visage et de l'avoir sans cesse devant eux. Ce visage mou et blafard eût été un spectacle insoutenable pour d'autres, mais ils éprouvaient un tel besoin de compagnie, qu'ils y reposaient leurs regards avec une véritable joie. On eût dit le masque dissous d'une morte, au milieu duquel on aurait mis deux yeux vivants ; ces yeux seuls bougeaient, roulant rapidement dans leur orbite ; les joues, la bouche étaient comme pétrifiées, elles gardaient une immobilité qui épouvantait. Lorsque madame Raquin se laissait aller au sommeil et baissait les paupières, sa face, alors toute blanche et toute muette, était vraiment celle d'un cadavre ; Thérèse et Laurent, qui ne sentaient plus personne avec eux, faisaient du bruit jusqu'à ce que la paralytique eût relevé les paupières et les eût regardés. Ils l'obligeaient ainsi à rester éveillée. (Zola, 1971 : 183)

Par ailleurs, le personnage de Camille, en se déplaçant d'un état à un autre, celui de la mort à la vie sous une forme spectrale, est décrit comme un monstre qui ne se lasse pas de hanter les nuits des deux coupables Thérèse et Laurent et d'aiguiser leur souffrance. Ce mort-vivant, par sa présence quasi fantastique, plonge les deux complices dans un gouffre sans fond :

> Le spectre de Camille évoqué venait de s'asseoir entre les nouveaux époux, en face du feu qui flambait. Thérèse et Laurent retrouvaient la senteur froide et humide du noyé dans l'air chaud qu'ils respiraient ; ils se disaient qu'un cadavre était là, près d'eux, et ils s'examinaient l'un l'autre, sans oser bouger. (Zola, 1971 : 148)

Camille va jusqu'à s'incarner dans le corps du chat, dont la présence devient, aux yeux de Laurent, monstrueuse et intenable, car elle lui rappelle sans cesse celle de sa victime :

> Il avait une haine implacable pour le chat tigré, François qui, dès qu'il arrivait, allait se réfugier sur les genoux de l'impotente. Si Laurent ne l'avait pas encore tué, c'est qu'à la vérité il n'osait le saisir. Le chat le regardait avec de gros yeux ronds d'une fixité diabolique. C'étaient ces yeux, toujours ouverts sur lui, qui exaspéraient le jeune homme, il se demandait ce que lui voulaient ces yeux qui ne le quittaient pas ; il finissait par avoir de véritables épouvantes, s'imaginant des choses absurdes. (Zola, 1971 : 158)

De même qu'il existe des lieux et des corps monstres de par leur forme, leur aspect physique ou leur état, il existe dans le texte zolien, si l'on ose dire, des caractères monstres ou des êtres monstrueux, non par le physique mais par le caractère. En effet, l'on trouve, à la lecture de *Thérèse Raquin*, une trace tangible de cette représentation du monstre chez deux personnages principaux de l'œuvre, notamment Thérèse et Laurent, dont la monstruosité pourrait leur être attribuée étant donné que le monstre, parmi ses innombrables définitions, désigne cet être qui s'écarte fortement de la norme sociale et choisit de transgresser la loi morale, de bon gré ou à contre gré : « qu'elle soit physique ou morale, réelle ou imaginaire, la monstruosité est bien une anomalie trop grave pour être assimilée à une anomalie ordinaire, un degré d'écart par rapport à la norme jugé insupportable ou scandaleux » (Cuny-Le Callet, 2005 : 16).

À suivre le parcours de ces deux personnages zoliens, l'on pourrait remarquer qu'ils sont pourvus d'un caractère qui s'écarte fortement de la morale, caractère ne pouvant être jugé qu'intolérable et scandaleux. À vrai dire, Thérèse et Laurent, tout au long de l'histoire, ne font fournir au lecteur que des comportements transgressifs, qui étonnent d'abord par cette tendance aux mensonges, à la mesquinerie et à l'hypocrisie, mais effraient surtout par cette mise en œuvre de l'adultère et de l'assassinat. En effet, le roman zolien dessine les contours d'une histoire tumultueuse de ces deux protagonistes dont l'appel de la chair les pousse tout d'abord à l'adultère, puis au crime et enfin au suicide : Thérèse, femme mal assouvie, cherche à goûter les affres de la passion non dans les bras de son mari chétif et fébrile Camille, mais dans ceux de son ami, Laurent, sans éprouver le moindre scrupule :

> La jeune femme semblait se plaire à l'audace et à l'impudence. Elle n'avait pas une hésitation, pas une peur. Elle se jetait dans l'adultère avec une sorte de franchise énergique, bravant le péril, mettant une sorte de vanité à le braver. (Zola, 1971 : 64)

Pour ce faire, elle s'attelle, non sans sadisme, à endosser le rôle de la femme docile, irréprochable et affaissée devant sa tante et son mari dupé et à fabriquer des mensonges, justifiant souvent ses longues absences par la migraine qui s'empare d'elle. Mais l'adultère, ne pouvant assouvir que relativement la soif passionnelle des deux amants, les pousse ensuite à échafauder un plan cruel, voire monstrueux, afin de se débarrasser du pauvre mari, en le tuant par noyade dans la Seine, et pouvoir alors vivre paisiblement leur amour fougueux :

> Camille se tourna et vit la figure effrayante de son ami, toute convulsionnée. Il ne comprit pas ; une épouvante vague le saisit. Il voulut crier, et sentit une main rude qui le serrait à la gorge. Avec l'instinct d'une bête qui se défend, il se dressa sur les genoux, se cramponnant au bord de la barque. Il lutta ainsi pendant quelques secondes. […] Laurent secouait toujours Camille, en le serrant d'une main à la gorge. Il finit par l'arracher de la barque à l'aide de son autre main. Il le tenait en l'air, ainsi qu'un enfant, au bout de ses bras vigoureux. […] Camille tomba en poussant un hurlement. Il revint deux ou trois fois sur l'eau, jetant des cris de plus en plus sourds. (Zola, 1971 : 91-92)

Or, ce crime, loin de leur faire goûter « le bonheur dans le crime », les tenaille et aiguillonne leur souffrance, les obligeant encore au mensonge et à la duperie, en jouant tantôt le rôle des deux enfants dévoués qui accourent aux petits soins de la vieille impotente, tantôt la comédie du remords. Mais les hallucinations spectrales continuent à les hanter, l'étau se resserre de plus en plus autour des deux meurtriers, qui finissent dans un geste de désespoir absolu, mais aussi de délivrance, par se suicider devant les yeux glacés et impitoyables de la mère paralytique.

Mais ce qui étonne par-dessus tout dans l'œuvre zolienne, c'est le traitement esthétique de la figure du monstre. L'on retrouve en effet des images où le monstre, qu'il soit lieu ou objet, perd sa valeur première, au profit d'une valeur nouvelle et contradictoire. Certains monstres dans *Thérèse Raquin* font l'objet de l'admiration et non de la frayeur, de l'attirance et non de la répulsion, de la beauté et non de la laideur. C'est le cas de la morgue, ce lieu-monstre qui, au-delà de son aspect macabre et repoussant, met parfois en relief cette beauté du laid et cet engouement pour le monstrueux et la monstruosité :

> La morgue est un spectacle à la portée de toutes les bourses, que se paient gratuitement les passants pauvres ou riches. La porte est ouverte, entre qui veut. Il y a des amateurs qui font un détour pour ne pas manquer une de ces représentations de la mort. Lorsque les dalles sont nues, les gens sortent désappointés, volés, murmurant entre leurs dents. Lorsque les dalles sont bien garnies, lorsqu'il y a un bel étalage de chair humaine, les visiteurs se pressent, se donnent des émotions à bon marché, s'épouvantent, plaisantent, applaudissent ou sifflent comme au théâtre, et se retirent satisfaits, en déclarant que la Morgue était réussie, ce jour-là. (Zola, 1971 : 163)

C'est ainsi que ce lieu monstre s'avère réversible. Les cadavres qui y habitent deviennent un tableau d'art sur lequel les visiteurs, qu'ils soient hommes, femmes ou jeunes garçons viennent jeter leurs regards curieux, enflammés de désir, voire vicieux.

Cette esthétique du laid se lit également dans les tableaux peints par Laurent dans une tentative d'échapper au spectre de Camille, après avoir commis son crime abominable. Ce

personnage masculin, jusque-là connu en tant que peintre raté, acquiert, après le meurtre de Camille, une sensibilité et un sens artistique « d'une lucidité étrange » :

> Certes ces études étaient gauches, mais elles avaient une étrangeté, un caractère si puissant qu'elles annonçaient un sens artistique des plus développés. On eût dit de la peinture vécue. Jamais l'ami de Laurent n'avait vu des ébauches si pleines de hautes promesses. […] Sans doute un phénomène étrange s'était accompli dans l'organisme du meurtrier de Camille. Il est difficile à l'analyse de pénétrer à de telles profondeurs. Laurent était peut-être devenu artiste lorsqu'il était devenu peureux, à la suite du grand détraquement qui a bouleversé sa chair et son esprit. (Zola, 1971 : 178-179)

C'est ainsi que cette œuvre d'art monstre doit être comprise dans un double sens : elle est monstre dans la mesure où elle est énorme et époustouflante, émanant d'un vrai talent et d'un grand génie artistique. Elle est aussi monstre car elle ne fait finalement penser qu'à la figure cadavérique et affreuse du pauvre noyé, dont l'incarnation spectrale a fait naître, chez les deux assassins, un sentiment de monstruosité et de désarroi. Témoin, ce passage :

> Lorsque son ami lui avait fait l'observation que toutes ses têtes d'étude avaient un air de famille, il s'était brusquement tourné pour cacher sa pâleur. C'est que déjà cette ressemblance fatale l'avait frappé. Il revint lentement se placer devant les toiles ; à mesure qu'il les contemplait, qu'il passait de l'une à l'autre, une sueur glacée lui mouillait le dos.
> — Il a raison, murmura-t-il, ils se ressemblent tous… ils ressemblent à Camille. (Zola, 1971 : 180)

En guise de conclusion, l'on pourrait dire que le monstre est un thème central dans *Thérèse Raquin* et la monstruosité y est un principe créateur et primordial qu'il faut lire avec rigueur et élucider. Les différentes déclinaisons du monstre rattachées à l'espace urbain, aux corps, aux spectres, ainsi qu'aux caractères des personnages dont l'existence était souvent marquée par une série d'écarts par rapport à la norme, à la coutume, à la loi morale et sociale et aux vertus universelles, ont montré en filigrane la fascination zolienne pour le dérèglement et la transgression, pour toutes ces vies à l'envers, pour toutes ces anomalies qui imprègnent le corps et l'esprit humains, qu'il fallait dépeindre scrupuleusement, combattre, supporter et dont il fallait assumer la responsabilité. La critique n'avait donc pas tort de qualifier de monstre tout à la fois le roman de *Thérèse Raquin*, étant donné qu'il contient d'innombrables images du monstrueux et de la monstruosité : « On aurait alors tort, pour citer un exemple des plus originaux, de s'étonner de voir un réalisateur de films coréen relire au XXI^{e} siècle *Thérèse Raquin* et mêler les crimes du roman à une histoire de vampires » (Verret, 2015 : 624) et son auteur, souvent jugé dangereux, névropathe et immoral, se plaisant à écrire et à décrire dans l'ensemble de son œuvre romanesque ce qui ne devait être ni écrit ni décrit.

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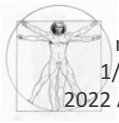

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Itinerarium mentis in Monstrum. Saggio su Juan Rodolfo Wilcock

Itinerarium mentis in Monstrum. Essay on Juan Rodolfo Wilcock

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Parole-chiave

Wilcock; Mostruoso; *Décorporation*; *Parassitologie*; Canguilhem.

Il testo affronta la produzione narrativa dello scrittore Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, inquadrandola all'interno di una prospettiva critica che trova nella nozione e nella figura del mostruoso il proprio *focus* tematico. Partendo dalla sua prima raccolta di racconti – *Il caos* – fino all'ultimo testo – *Il libro dei mostri* – le nostre riflessioni non si limiteranno ad esaminare lo sviluppo dell'universo di Wilcock ma, dopo aver visto il rilievo particolare che assume in esso il genere trasversale della *paradossografia*, ci serviremo di alcuni importanti studi di Tzvetan Todorov, di Georges Canguilhem e di Jean-Clet Martin, per esaminare in dettaglio i tre processi specifici che presiedono alla declinazione della dimensione teratologica: *décorporation, parassitologia, vacuum formarum*. Le riflessioni su queste tre nozioni ci permetteranno quindi di vedere in che modo l'orizzonte concettuale del mostruoso rappresenti all'interno della scrittura wilcockiana un trasversale terminale ermeneutico in grado di raccordare numerosi nuclei concettuali che non smettono di ritornare nel corso della sua vasta, sfaccettata ed eterogenea produzione.

Keywords

Wilcock; Monstrous; *Décorporation*; *Parasitology*; Canguilhem.

The text focuses on the narrative production of the writer Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, analyzed within a critical perspective that finds its thematic center in the notion and figure of the monstrous. Starting from his first collection of short stories – *Il caos* – up to the last text – *Il libro dei mostri* – our reflections will not be limited to examining the development of Wilcock's universe but, after having seen the particular importance that the transversal genre of paradoxography assumes in it, we will use some important studies by Tzvetan Todorov, Georges Canguilhem and Jean-Clet Martin, to examine in detail the three specific processes that govern the declination of the teratological dimension: *décorporation, parasitology, vacuum formarum*. The reflections on these three notions will therefore allow us to see how the conceptual horizon of the monstrous represents within Wilcock's writing a transversal hermeneutic pole capable of connecting numerous thematic nuclei that keep returning throughout his rich, multifaceted and heterogeneous production.

1. Paradossografie

Nel 1960, in un contesto culturale dove nomi come quelli di Vittorini e Moravia, Calvino e Pratolini, Pasolini e Bassani, occupavano il centro della scena con un'idea di letteratura che poco spazio lasciava a forme di scrittura aventi nello sfaccettato filone del fantastico (Todorov, 1970: 46-63) il loro *humus*, presso Bompiani vede la luce un piccolo testo di appena duecento pagine dal titolo lapidario: *Il caos* (Deidier; Nisini, 2021: 21-36).

Si tratta di una raccolta di racconti di varia lunghezza in cui i personaggi sono prevalentemente delle figure appena abbozzate, prive di caratteri ben definiti. Queste si agitano vanamente in una serie di vicende grottesche e surreali, ove lambiccate sessioni di torture fisiche, rapporti fedifraghi conclusi da uccisioni violente, stolide amanti divorate da enormi creature ctonie, attentati politici architettati come astruse trappole logiche accompagnano il lettore in una galleria di situazioni in cui lo stile asciutto e diretto, il distacco ironico e freddo dell'autore concorre a conferire una patina di crudeltà gratuita e divertita.

In tal senso vale allora la pena leggere un piccolo estratto da *La bella Concetta*, quarto scritto del volume. Il testo imita le movenze del racconto avente per oggetto una serie di avventure giovanili derubricabili come esperienze di una timida ed ingenua educazione sentimentale. Ma senza preavviso, dopo qualche battuta iniziale, il tono della narrazione muta in maniera irreversibile:

> le mie dita avide le avevano strappato quasi fino al capezzolo la liscia pelle del petto, che ora penzolava tutta rattrappita come la buccia di una pesca. Dentro, oh inganno, invece di carne scorgevo una sostanza terrosa, granulosa, simile all'interno di un formicaio [...]. Introdussi due o tre dita per vedere cosa ci fosse dentro, tirando fuori un pezzo di quella roba strana che d'altronde mi stava già franando in bocca. Allora vidi che dalle minuscole gallerie spuntavano milioni di vermi come spaghetti, bianchi nel mezzo, ma dagli estremi delicatamente rosei. (Wilcock, 1960: 87)

Concetta reca nelle sue carni e nei suoi tessuti una suppurante vita in putrefazione continua ed indocile. I vermi bianco-rosei, caratterizzati da una certa grazia che li rende quasi preziosi e raffinati al momento della loro inopinata apparizione, scavano gallerie profonde e tortuose, che la fanciulla alberga segretamente in sé, quasi fossero gli agenti effettivi della sua rinomata beltà esteriore.

Porosa e cedevole come un terreno attraversato da innumerevoli vertigini di smottamenti, Concetta assomiglia ad una vivente plaga di sabbie mobili, nel cui fermentare il protagonista rischia ogni volta di precipitare per rimanervi prigioniero.

La ragazza custodisce, non senza una certa malizia tutta adolescenziale, una variegata congerie di micro-mostruosità meccanico-organiche che il narratore di volta in volta sperimenta a sue spese. Dopo il primo incontro, ce n'è un altro in cui egli prova ad inserire un indice in uno dei fori prodottosi sull'epidermide di Concetta:

> tocca e ritocca, quando già credevo di arrivare al sodo, le mie dita si imbatterono in un oggetto duro, freddo e metallico […]. Subito dopo un dolore intensissimo alla mano destra mi fece lanciare un urlo incontenibile. Avevo messo la mano, a quanto sembrava, in una trappola per conigli. Più cercavo di liberarmi, più si stringeva la morsa di quelle mandibole d'acciaio che avevano imprigionato quattro delle mie cinque dita distratte. Contemporaneamente, una serie di scariche elettriche mi attraversava il corpo. (90)

Come è possibile desumere dalla lettura di questi estratti, il fantastico messo a punto da Wilcock è molto difforme da quello di Borges o Casares. E, nello stesso modo, esso presenta in effetti pochi punti di contatto con la narrativa di altri due grandi autori della letteratura sud-americana del secondo Novecento, come Carlos Fuentes o Garcia Marquez. Ciò accade perché il fantastico di Wilcock ha un'origine molto più remota e fa riferimento ad un genere piuttosto preciso, che soprattutto nel periodo tardo-antico ha conosciuto una larga fortuna, per poi estinguersi senza quasi lasciar traccia.

Si tratta delle *paradossografia*, genere in prosa che più o meno vede la propria fioritura in età ellenistica e imperiale, grazie alle opere di autori come Bolo di Mende, Stratone di Lampsaco – un peripatetico attratto soprattutto dalle stranezze di natura zoologica – Archelao del Chersoneso – autore di una raccolta dal titolo decisamente wilcockiano, ovvero *Ἰδιοφυή*, traducibile con *Le singolarità della natura* – nonché, più tardi, i più noti Claudio Eliano, Aulo Gellio e naturalmente Plinio il Vecchio (Westermann, 1839: s. p.).

Parassitaria e collaterale rispetto ai generi letterari ampiamente consolidati nelle loro forme e nelle loro tradizioni, quali la storiografia o gli scritti di biologia, la paradossografia s'incunea nella vasta produzione trattatistica che dalla grecità tardo-classica arriva a lambire le ultime propaggini della letteratura latina, attraverso un catalogo polimorfo di *mirabilia* (Giannini, 1964: s. p.).

Questi affollano e impreziosiscono le pagine degli autori citati, creando una sorta di accidentato ma tenace *trait d'union* in grado di saldare le manifestazioni estreme della mitografia alle prime prove di una letteratura di descrizione, analisi e spiegazione avente per oggetto determinati fenomeni naturali inquadrati tuttavia in un tipo di riflessione che solo molto più tardi sarebbe stata identificata con i tratti propri di una mentalità pseudo-scientifica (s. p.).

La paradossografia si inscrive in questo discorso con le sembianze di un genere ambiguo, fluttuante tra varie tipologie di scrittura, con i connotati di un genere-ombra che li percorre trasversalmente tutti, mettendoli ora in contrasto ora in contatto, tramite un mobile montaggio di narrazioni che trovano il loro punto di raccordo nel fatto di risultare eccentriche rispetto ad ogni genere già più o meno codificato (Todorov, 1970: 13-25).

La paradossografia sorge nei recessi della grande storiografia, si annida silenziosa tra i macilenti trattati di quelle discipline che solo dopo secoli potranno essere riconosciute come scientifiche a pieno titolo, ma che ancora recano nella loro confusa tessitura di linguaggi e nozioni le incrostazioni di un plurisecolare pensiero pre-logico.

Muovendosi negli anfratti della storia della cultura, Wilcock va a riesumare questo filone per rinverdirne i fasti in un momento in cui il progresso scientifico sembra aver preso il sopravvento definitivo, attraverso un testo che vede la luce, sempre per Bompiani, esattamente un anno dopo la pubblicazione de *Il caos* e reca un titolo tanto sibillino quanto eloquente: *Fatti inquietanti*. Si tratta di una raccolta di piccoli scritti dal taglio seccamente cronachistico e tenacemente raziocinativo, in cui l'autore propone una sorta di chirurgico inventario di una ricca congerie di eventi e fenomeni, i quali attirano l'attenzione e sollecitano l'onnivora curiosità di Wilcock per una serie di connotati ricorrenti:

1. Un buon numero di vicende trova nell'evoluzione delle scienze esatte – microfisica, biologia molecolare, recenti apporti della chimica applicata alla produzione di materiali industriali – il loro mobile elemento di raccordo. Wilcock, ad esempio, è attratto da uno strano dispositivo elettro-meccanico denominato *Perceptron* (Rosenblatt, 1962: s. p.). Tale congegno simula, in una versione semplificata, il funzionamento degli strati più elementari dell'apparato cognitivo umano: siamo agli albori di quello che oggi viene comunemente definito con

espressione ormai corrente *riconoscimento facciale* (1992: 90). Va segnalato che Wilcock non esprime mai una preoccupazione particolare, ma si limita ad elencarne stenograficamente le caratteristiche, producendosi nella stesura di un testo stilisticamente affine ad un mero referto tecnico-scientifico (Todorov, 1970: 80-112).

2. In alcuni casi l'autore riferisce dei fatti di costume apparentemente privi di un particolare interesse. Nonostante ciò, questi assumono ai suoi occhi una fisionomia che presenta qualcosa di sottilmente mostruoso. È il caso del *bambino meccanico*, che apre la raccolta (1992: 15-17), oppure del testo, breve e disorientante, intitolato *La grande fessura* (131). Questa circonda l'orbe terraqueo tracciando attorno ai continenti un solco enigmatico e invisibile, nelle gole del quale il mondo conosciuto sembra precipitare come verso la propria origine sconosciuta e infera. La *grande fessura* assomiglia così ad un'immensa sutura coronale che attraversa il cranio della Terra, come una profonda traccia fossile da cui probabilmente potrebbe essersi generata ogni cosa, simile a una sorta di inconcepibile utero di affastellate macerie minerali.

3. Ci sono poi anche dei casi in cui Wilcock non si limita a raccontare il *fatto inquietante*, ma si sofferma a chiosarne alcuni aspetti che poco a poco assumono un rilievo crescente, così da rendere la vicenda narrata sempre più paradossale. Si prenda, a mo' di esempio, lo stupendo scritto intitolato *Patologia della noia*, in cui l'autore riferisce i risultati di un insolito esperimento scientifico mirante a decifrare gli effetti psico-fisici che si producono presso soggetti isolati in una spoglia stanza e sottoposti ad una totale privazione di attività, costretti cioè ad annoiarsi (1992: 36-37). I *fatti inquietanti* che Wilcock collaziona disegnano quindi la latitudine incerta di un approccio critico, il quale non può trovare collocazione legittima presso nessun ordine di classificazione o di definizione conosciuto.

La paradossografia riaffiora senza preavviso quasi ad illuminare il volto d'ombra del Novecento, schiudendosi nel frastagliato spazio di dispersione e raccolta di un discorso in cui l'eccezione, la rarità e il teratologico costituiscono gli assi portanti di una riflessione che trova nella scrittura i Wilcock il suo terreno d'elezione.

Egli diventa così lo scriba solitario e trasparente che con rabdomantica propensione per tutto ciò che appare«» deviante rispetto a una presunta realtà, compila l'inesauribile diorama di *mirabilia* chiamati a comporre la densa casistica di una destabilizzante paradossografia tutta moderna. Non è allora un caso che *Scriba* sia proprio il titolo di una delle formidabili prose poste a concludere il volumetto del 1960:

> invisibile e fuori del tempo, il *meccanico linguistico* redige la sua lettera telescopica all'avvenire: "...tricolore zampillava ora una bestiola screziata, tutta di cannelli di gomma striata sopra un'armatura di fili d'argento, con rotelle pneumatiche alle zampe, vibrante come una gelatina, dalla cui bocca usciva un flutto abbondante di succo di violino..." (193)

L'inquietudine sottile che pulsa sotto i fatti di cronaca presentati nella raccolta del 1961 è quella di un linguaggio e di un pensiero, i quali si dibattono sul retroscena di una realtà che non riesce mai a trovare espressione compiuta, pur urlando la sua presenza molesta e deforme al di sotto di ogni singolo evento, anche di quello apparentemente più quotidiano e banale.

Il bambino che vede e sente i propri organi tramutati in gangli di terminazioni elettriche in costante corto-circuito, la grande fessura che da un momento all'altro sembra ingoiare il mondo in una sorta di millenaria peristalsi calcarea e lo scabroso polipaio di meta-corpi

(Schefer, 2014: 73-74) che gli annoiati sentono crescere d'improvviso sotto la pelle anticipano così in maniera eclatante i futuri sviluppi di quella particolarissima e traumatica esplorazione del mostruoso a cui Wilcock si dedicherà in tre importanti opere pubblicate nel corso degli anni '70.

2. Tra l'aberrante e l'abnorme. Verso le slabbrate latebre del pre-umano

La dimensione di pervasiva visionarietà in cui è calato lo scriba ha una precisa ragion d'essere, tanto più se si tengono presenti gli sviluppi ulteriori della produzione di Wilcock: egli non è solo un rarefattissimo e anonimo *alter ego* dell'autore, ma in ultima istanza costituisce l'umbratile controfigura di tutti quei personaggi che si moltiplicheranno nelle pagine de *La sinagoga degli iconoclasti*, pubblicato per la prima volta nel 1972 presso Adelphi.

In quest'opera Wilcock perfeziona il suo gusto per la paradossografia, arrivando così a creare un'iperbolica museografia del mostruoso, declinata attraverso trentacinque pseudo-biografie ove incontriamo lividi teosofi affetti da una sorta di volontaria metensomatosi, pasticcieri speculativi autori di una filosofia biochimica della storia, zoologi convinti di poter decifrare la scrittura della creazione in chiave bustrofedica, alchimisti fuori tempo per i quali «la vera cosmogonia consiste nel fatto che la terra è una sfera vuota nell'interno della quale è contenuto l'universo» (2014: 119).

L'operazione dell'autore punta a rileggere buona parte della storia moderno-contemporanea, incassandovi dei fatti minimi, i quali proiettano lo sviluppo spirituale e culturale dell'Occidente in uno schema ove scienze esatte, filosofia, teologia, ingegneria, letteratura si profilano con i tratti deformi di discipline che non interrogano la realtà cercando di penetrarla nelle sue complesse strutture, ma piuttosto cercano di interpretarla in una maniera delicatamente allucinatoria, trasformandola in un formicolante coacervo di supposizioni, tesi, previsioni, formulazioni, nel cui nitidissimo labirinto di linguaggio il lettore si smarrisce senza possibilità di ritorno.

Non è un caso, per esempio, che Llorenz Riber, originale drammaturgo vissuto nella prima metà del Novecento venga recensito nella raccolta di Wilcock per un suo curioso lavoro teatrale mirante a mettere in scena una riduzione delle *Philosophische Bemerkungen* di Wittgenstein. Riber procede organizzando dei piccoli *entr'actes* ognuno corrispondente ad un diverso *gioco linguistico* (2014: 183). L'autore trasforma il testo del pensatore austriaco in una partitura di elementari grammatiche in collisione, le quali esondano gradualmente al di fuori del semplice testo destinato alla recitazione per travolgere lo spazio scenico stesso, tramutatosi in una sorta di ossario-dizionario in cui le parole utilizzate per designare gli oggetti giacciono dinanzi agli spettatori come assurde nature morte dalle forme irriconoscibili.

La trasposizione di Riber elenca una serie aperta di atti linguistici piuttosto semplici e consueti, che però d'improvviso non riescono più a funzionare in maniera lineare. Degli elementi allotri filtrano in essi, li mettono in scacco, facendoli diventare delle vaniloquenti pantomime di atti mancati, il cui reale significato è ormai andato miseramente perduto, simile ad una sorta di geroglifico verbale logoratosi prima ancora di essere mai stato messo in pratica.

Partendo da Wittgenstein e lavorando perversamente contro gli assunti fondamentali di quest'ultimo, il drammaturgo inscena la parodia di un linguaggio che si esaurisce ed implode nel tentativo di proferire la propria irriducibile afasia. La parola brancola e si disgrega inane in una concatenazione sempre più improbabile e incongrua di quadri drammatici che assediano la figura recitante fino a rinchiuderla in un solipsismo accerchiante:

> l'atto si dilungava in altre interessanti illustrazioni della teoria della personalità, finché la Donovan non cadeva in preda del più delirante dei solipsismi: negava l'esistenza sia degli altri attori che del pubblico, non rispondeva più quando le parlavano, provava a sedersi e invece cadeva per terra accanto alla sedia, tanto era certa che il mondo fisico fosse scomparso. (183-184)

Nell'aberrante rilettura del testo wittgensteiniano il linguaggio si (de)struttura in un diagramma di puntiformi catastrofi semantiche, le quali in maniera altrettanto puntiforme si riverberano in ultimo sul piano strettamente pragmatico: i processi di disfunzione logica che debilitano irreversibilmente ogni atto di parola, spalancano un'ottusa macchia di insignificanza nella trama stessa del reale, ove poco a poco tutto viene risucchiato, fino alla cancellazione definitiva del mondo stesso, ridotto ad una lacuna concentrica, attorno alla quale le movenze e le posture degli attori si rapprendono, indecifrabili pur nella loro piatta quotidianità, in un vacuo gioco di gesticolazioni tanto enfatiche quanto inconsistenti.

Ma, oltre a Riber, ci sono almeno altri due personaggi che incarnano qualcosa di mostruoso, anticipando in ciò alcune figure che più tardi imperverseranno più tardi nelle pagine di Wilcock. Si prenda allora la pseudobiografia di Absalon Amet, orologiaio vissuto nel 1700. Spirito pienamente illuminista e razionalista, di grande ingegno tecnico-fabrile. Wilcock lo presenta come *uomo di meccanismi* (67), dal momento che era riuscito a costruire una sorta di rudimentale prototipo di androide parlante:

> Amet aveva inventato e fabbricato un *Filosofo Universale* che all'inizio occupava la metà di un tavolo ma alla fine occupava un'intera stanza. Essenzialmente, l'apparecchio consisteva in un insieme abbastanza semplice di ruote dentate caricate a molla e regolate nel loro movimento da uno speciale congegno a scatto che periodicamente fermava l'ingranaggio. Cinque (nella versione iniziale) di queste ruote, di diametro diverso, erano coassiali con altrettanti cilindri grossi e piccoli, interamente ricoperti di targhette su ciascuna delle quali era scritto un vocabolo. (68)

Così concepito, il *Filosofo Universale* deve imitare il linguaggio umano, non tanto nel funzionamento e nella genesi dell'espressione, quanto piuttosto nel risultato, ovvero nell'emissione di suoni articolati a cui associare un senso predelineato (102-103). Il *Filosofo Universale* mima le possibilità basilari di un discorso logico attraverso l'allestimento di un raffinato meccanismo che con il pensiero umano non ha di fatto alcun addentellato effettivo.

La logica che dovrebbe stare a fondamento delle varie espressioni è quindi qui soltanto una sorta di macroscopica illusione ottica, ottenuta per altro in maniera alquanto deludente. Ciò spiega perché le proporzioni materiali dell'invenzione si siano dilatate fino ad occupare un'intera stanza (Canguilhem, 1962: s. p.), adibita a mostruosa *camera psichica* ove il linguaggio – e quindi il pensiero che esso dovrebbe veicolare – viene faticosamente prodotto *in vitro* (2014: 68). Facendo salire o scendere i cilindri, grazie a ritmiche oscillazioni di rulli ad incastro, Amet ottiene infatti una sequenza pressoché infinite di variazioni e di ricombinazioni lessicali.

Il *Filosofo Universale* si profila come una sorta di verbigerante manichino affetto da una proliferante ecolalia trascendentale, da cui però a volte vengono prodotte delle locuzioni destinate a segnare la storia dell'umanità futura – «tutto il reale è razionale», «l'arte è sentimento», «l'inferno sono gli altri» – raccolte in un'antologia datata 1774. Simmetrici e

inversi nelle loro intenzioni e nelle loro concezioni, Riber e Amet progettano l'elaborazione sperimentale e fallimentare di un linguaggio asignificante, in grado non tanto di esprimere, quanto di mettere in scena unicamente le proprie dinamiche di minuta (dis)articolazione endogena.

Esso culmina in un'abnorme tautologia: il macchinoso e straripante congegno verbale messo a punto dall'orologiaio francese è pensato in modo tale da trasformare ogni singolo segmento frastico in una poderosa enunciazione meta-discorsiva, la quale finisce col paralizzare e quindi col mandare in stallo il processo stesso del linguaggio. Gli ingranaggi della macchina linguistica non sono più destinati a rispecchiare o a designare vari stati di cose, ma piuttosto si trovano improvvisamente respinti – quasi retrocessi – nell'umbratile regione epigenetica ove la parola prende forma prima ancora di aver ricevuto un senso definito, legata ad uno stadio pre-espressivo del linguaggio.

Pensiero e parola entrano così in una relazione controversa in forza di un'interferenza prolungata e ostinata, innervante il funzionamento stesso del *Filosofo Universale*, il quale non coincide più con la voce preclara della *Ratio* pervenuta al più alto livello di maturazione e di manifestazione (70), ma è piuttosto l'esorbitante *trompe l'œil* di un linguaggio che inizia a girare a vuoto nell'estremo e fatuo tentativo di rendere conto delle proprie strutturazioni intestine. Sempre prossimo ad implodere in una fragorosa farragine d'impraticabili grammatiche, il *Filosofo Universale* incarna quindi il *Logos* in una maniera totalmente distorta, conducendolo in ultima istanza a franare senza resto verso l'inafferrabile punto cieco del proprio sfingeo delirare.

Se quanto abbiamo detto finora è giusto, non sorprenderà per nulla il fatto che nel novero delle molteplici mostruosità elettro-bio-meccaniche escogitate e realizzate dai vari personaggi di Wilcock figuri anche il dottor Alfred Attendu, direttore del celebre ospizio dei cretini (101). Gli studi di questo acutissimo luminare dell'idiozia sapientemente indotta muovono da un assunto elementare e inoppugnabile: l'incremento della massa cerebrale presso il *Sapiens Sapiens* va concepito come una forma di degenerazione, come una specie di degradazione psico-fisica che l'uomo ha subito nel corso dei secoli.

Le teorie del medico puntano a dimostrare che lo sviluppo dell'encefalo nelle dimensioni a cui è pervenuto oggi si è tradotto in un peggioramento delle condizioni di vita dei soggetti, a tal punto che uno stato aurorale e primigenio di immacolata idiozia non è solo ciò che Attendu colloca all'inizio dell'umanità, ma è anche ciò a cui il medico vorrebbe ritornare attraverso una sorta di mostruosa inversione evolutiva, che di fatto sarebbe l'unica forma di progresso effettivo e felice: «nel suo libro, lo psichiatra francese descrive o propone un Eden originale popolato da imbecilli: pigri, torpidi, dagli occhi porcini, guance gialle, labbra spesse, lingua sporgente, voce bassa e rauca, l'udito scarso, il sesso irrilevante» (102-103).

La perfezione dell'uomo è conservata solo permanendo nello stato di beata ebetudine, di deliberato abbrutimento e di torbida inconsapevolezza da cui purtroppo i loro discendenti si sono progressivamente allontanati, di fatto decadendo da uno stato di grazia a una sorta di corruzione irreversibile. Per Attendu quindi l'imbecillità primeva è un dato storico concreto ed un valore da ripristinare a tutti i costi, ricorrendo a quella che Wilcock denomina, con formula icastica, *terapia del porcile* (103-105).

Ma per ritornare a questo stadio ancestrale del subumano il primo intervento messo in atto deve colpire proprio il linguaggio. La capacità di articolare il pensiero attraverso delle espressioni verbali di senso compiuto merita, agli occhi di Attendu, di essere smontata, fino ad

una sorta di ottundimento generalizzato che riporta i soggetti sottoposti alla chirurgica *terapia del porcile* ad una animalità perfetta e integrale (105).

I gesti e le azioni compiute dagli internati rivelano pertanto una stretta parentela con le gesticolazioni incongrue degli attori incontrati nella *pièce* wittgensteiniana di Riber. Se però i personaggi del drammaturgo spagnolo si muovevano, seppur in maniera goffa e scomposta, in un sistema di giochi linguistici ancora velatamente strutturati, gli ospiti del medico francese non hanno più alcuna dimensione propria d'esistenza, lasciati alla deriva in una totale e mirata perdita di identità, la quale per Attendu coincide con l'ingresso in un tenero e struggente vuoto mentale.

Simili a decerebrate monadi chiuse nell'assorto mutismo di una demenza edenica, i soggetti sottoposti alla *terapia del porcile* abitano uno spazio in cui anche il divenire storico è stato riassorbito in una sorda stagnazione atemporale da cui non c'è più via di scampo. Attendu sogna di progettare un mondo definitivamente annegato nell'incoscienza e nell'incomunicabilità, arenatosi in una dimensione post-storica, in cui non sia data alcuna possibilità di sviluppo, di progresso, di evoluzione.

Le creature para-umane, ormai inabili al pensiero, ottenute attraverso l'applicazione puntuale della *teoria del porcile* iniziano così a manifestare una strana ed inquietante familiarità con il *Filosofo Universale* di Amet: in entrambi i casi il destino dell'uomo è il raggiungimento della perfezione primigenia di una demenza che corrisponde esattamente al balbettio ebete e aurorale della creazione (214-215): gli internati sono ormai creature ove la componente umana è un dato pressoché residuale, una lieve penombra che aleggia sfigurata su di loro, ridotti in ultimo a dei giganteschi protozoi umanoidi smarriti in un livido schiumare di azioni rapprese in sordidi capricci di euforia ebefrenica (Canguilhem, 1962: s.p.).

Anche in questo caso i risultati ottenuti da Attendu trovano non poche risonanze con gli esiti a cui perviene il *Filosofo Universale* di Amet: la Storia si arresta, inizia ad involversi in un vischioso moto retrogrado mirante alla cancellazione stessa del presente prima e del passato poi. Non a caso *La sinagoga degli iconoclasti* si chiude evocando le arditissime tesi esposte dall'oscuro pensatore Félicien Raegge in un saggio di anti-filosofia della storia dal titolo più che eloquente: *La flèche du temps* (2014: 215).

L'opera di Raegge sancisce la saldatura compiuta tra la paradossografia più avanzata, la storiografia intesa come rilettura retrograda del divenire universale e un'idea di letteratura fantastica in cui gli attori e i personaggi delle vicende sono tutte figure storiche richiamate sul palcoscenico del mondo in una straziante vita postuma sotto forma di schiere di corpi marcescenti (Ancet, 2006: 14-27), i quali ripetono senza sosta i medesimi gesti, le medesime posture, le medesime frasi al contrario, riavvolgendo così inarrestabilmente il lungo nastro della Storia affinché di questa non rimanga più nulla, sottoposta ad un capillare processo di cancellazione.

Se i drammi di Riber paralizzavano il presente ed il *Filosofo Universale* di Amet rendeva pressoché superfluo il futuro, nei dementi di Attendu ad essere del tutto obliterato è ciò che resta del passato. Juan Rodolfo Wilcock ci conduce così in un turbolento *chaosmos* (Joyce, 2014: 118) ove in tenue gestazione iniziano già ad intravedersi molli, cedevoli, effimere stratificazioni di strane creature senza nome. Il *Libro dei mostri* sta per nascere...

3. Teratofanie, teratodromie, teratogonie

Oltre a *La sinagoga degli iconoclasti* nel 1972 Wilcock dà alle stampe anche un'altra opera, dal titolo piuttosto impegnativo: *Lo stereoscopio dei solitari*. L'autore argentino ritorna alle origini:

come *Il caos*, il testo si sviluppa attraverso una successione incalzante di brevi quadri micro-narrativi, i quali riportano le astruse vicende di personaggi colpiti da incomprensibili anomalie.

Il mostruoso ha fatto ormai irruzione in maniera traumatica nell'universo romanzesco di Wilcock e così troviamo narrate in dettaglio le notti di Rapimio, il quale non può sopportare la luce in nessun momento della sua monotona e piatta giornata. Per questo motivo egli riempie il proprio modesto appartamento di oggetti fosforescenti, i quali popolano di linguegianti barbagli la perenne semi-oscurità in cui ha deciso di tumularsi vivo. La cosa più complessa in una situazione del genere è mostrarsi allo specchio: Rapimio affiora per rapidi frangenti dal fondo opaco della superficie riflettente sotto forma di un profilo appena luminescente, che si agita sinuoso sul vetro nero come una sorta di intermittente e grigio-biancastra vibrazione animale, la quale s'increspa appena nella densa notte delle quattro pareti ove egli si è volontariamente relegato.

Rapimio appare pertanto solo attraverso l'instabile sagoma bluastra che egli lascia dietro di sé ogni volta che si muove. Ormai privo di spessore e di consistenza, egli fluttua remoto a se stesso in un contrattile spazio di manifestazione, che lo porta a scivolare sugli oggetti senza aderire a nessuna superficie, simile ad un confuso spolverio di cromie incerte e cangianti, attraverso le quali egli punta soltanto a mimetizzarsi il più possibile con la cieca livrea di compatta tenebra che la notte stende inesorabile sul mondo.

Tutto questo naturalmente finché un giorno non compaiono quasi dal nulla «dei nuovi isotopi radioattivi, di fluorescenza illimitata» (Wilcock, 2017: 56). Rapimio allora si converte senza esitazioni a questa luce affilata e lenticolare, in grado di penetrare tessuti e cellule disgregandoli in un pulviscolo concentrico di vertiginose vibratilità perdute nella microfisica notte della materia. Egli quindi

> si offre ussaro ai raggi alfa, ai beta, agli x, perfino ai raggi cosmici. Ha perso già la punta di due dita; aghi di ghiaccio gli percorrono la schiena; il ginocchio sinistro non si piega. Eppure, eppure, lì sdraiato nel suo nero infinito senza distanze, attorniato da pallide forme verdastre che a volte sembrano avvicinarsi e altre volte allontanarsi, Rapimio ha sconfitto il tempo, e col tempo il dolore, l'affanno, la paura. (57)

Irradiazioni plurali e policentriche lo accerchiano e lo trapassano senza sosta, lo scolpiscono come invisibili e improvvise punte di scalpello, le quali poco a poco lo deprivano del corpo, svanito in una lancinante implosione subatomica e transcodificato in una labile frangia di emissioni ultraviolette che però non toccano la sua coscienza, rimasta inspiegabilmente integra, seppur scagliata in un'avviluppante immensità siderale, destinata a divenire il suo smisurato sarcofago.

Qui Rapimio, ormai definitivamente smaterializzato (Schefer, 2014: 100), finisce col trasfondersi in un nervoso flusso ondulatorio, in un fascio nomade di detritiche frequenze elettromagnetiche che solcano il silenzio dell'universo, tramandolo d'un mormorio inudibile ma incessante, in cui egli riconosce con chiarezza e forse con un brivido di nostalgia l'eco deformata del proprio nome proferito da ciò che in un tempo ormai immemorabile era forse lo spento involucro da cui scaturiva la sua voce.

Con *Lo stereoscopio dei solitari* Wilcock inaugura di fatto una nuova fase della sua produzione narrativa, talmente originale e innovativa sotto numerosi punti di vista che risulta difficile anche trovarle un inquadramento più o meno preciso all'interno dei vari generi e sotto-generi. In questa raccolta, infatti, anche i tratti propri della paradossografia e della letteratura

fantastica sono ormai oltrepassati verso un'idea di scrittura che reinventa uno stile situabile al punto di convergenza di varie correnti piuttosto eterogenee tra di loro, ove il trattato scientifico convive senza tensioni apparenti con un linguaggio chiamato a fondare una nuova mitologia (125-127).

Altre volte Wilcock rilegge la letteratura fantastica dell'antichità per fornirne una versione tutta moderna, spesso aspramente realistica e cruda, come accade con due delle prose a nostro giudizio più divertenti ed acute, ovvero *L'angelo* e *La sirena*. Nel primo testo la creatura divina si trova irreparabilmente destinata ad una grama vita terrena, dal momento che nessuno crede più in un Altrove deputato dalla tradizione ad essere il suo luogo naturale.

Elzevar, questo il nome dell'angelo, è costretto a rimestare tra i rifiuti della spazzatura mangiando avanzi di cibi marci e prostituendosi presso il fiume. La sua onniscienza legata alla condizione originaria è messa in campo unicamente per dedicarsi ai lavori più degradanti. Ma l'attività di meretricio incontra un ostacolo insormontabile a cui lo condanna la sua stessa natura divina: l'assenza di sesso. Ciò gli provoca continui disguidi con i vari avventori che finiscono con il percuoterlo, privandolo anche della misera paga.

Uguale sorte è toccata alla sirena, che per sopravvivere all'avanzata della modernità ha trovato come improbabile *habitat* i puteolenti canali di un gorgogliante scolo fognario di una piccola città industriale di provincia. Un tempo creatura stupenda e nobile, essa ora è condannata a sguazzare per sempre tra liquami e fanghiglia, ritrovandosi tra i capelli torsoli di mela, cartacce sudicie, croste di cibi buttati via.

Il suo corpo è un dolorante ricettacolo di sgraffiature, pruriti, infezioni, malattie, escoriazioni. Le poche persone che passano di lì non la riconoscono in quanto sirena, esposta a motteggi grevi e salaci da parte degli uomini; un prete ha anche cercato di scacciarla praticandole un esorcismo. Conclude Wilcock: «l'ultima sirena del fiume è molto depressa e già ben due volte ha tentato il suicidio, con quei tubetti di barbiturici che in primavera trascina la piena» (88).

Si legga però a questo punto un testo come *La sfera*, forse uno degli scritti più ardui di tutta la raccolta. Per ovvi motivi riportiamo qui il testo nella sua integrità:

> basta fissare con attenzione un punto qualsiasi della notte, meglio se una stella di terza o quarta grandezza, perché il punto osservato diventi una sfera ruotante luminosa. Le possibilità di una simile sfera sono pressoché infinite, ma il più delle volte, purché nessuna disattenzione venga a turbare il processo, man mano che l'immagine si espande, rivelerà un'architettura barocca, coronata di mazzi di piume pietrificate, di stemmi ritorti e di volute in continuo sviluppo e mutamento, pittoricamente iridate. (69)

La scrittura di Wilcock s'impenna vertiginosa verso una ricerca strenua e glaciale di rarefazione. Il fenomeno rimane del tutto inattingibile dietro la misteriosa patina di metafisica bellezza che lo circonda. La sfera appare senza preavviso in un'ordinatissima esplosione di elementi perfettamente geometrici che la corteggiano e la rendono ancora più preziosa nella sua indecifrabile gratuità. Essa non accetta e non sopporta spiegazioni. Sontuosamente mostruosa nell'infallibile splendore del suo criptico manifestarsi, la sfera si sviluppa dinanzi a noi senza dispersioni o perdite, incrinature o lesioni, in una multiforme teoria di ineffabili architetture aeree trascoloranti senza sosta le une nelle flebili intercapedini delle altre:

> vasta e leggera, la struttura barocca si è popolata di statue, le loro tuniche ondeggiano nella luce mutevole, chiome instabili di marmo si sciolgono e si riversano sui lunghi colli cerei, gli occhi profondi delle statue guardano lucidi l'osservatore assorto, braccia tornite si protendono, l'intera notte è diventata una fiamma barocca e bianca, su per le colonne serpeggiano i riflessi, fioriscono i capitelli, sorridono i forti telamoni e le cariatidi. (69-70)

Partorita dalla *mira profunditas* dei medesimi abissi astrali in cui Rapimio si era reso irreperibile per sempre, svaporando in uno sfarfallio di lontananti iridescenze, la sfera affiora nel suo nudo nitore euclideo secernendo un contrattissimo universo di poligoni in costante variazione volumetrica, i quali infine si coagulano poco a poco in vasti ambienti gremiti di sculture arcaiche, di complesse decorazioni barocche, di lunghe file di colonnati estranei a qualsiasi opera conosciuta. Simili a proiezioni di una soverchiante psiche divina, tutte queste topologie in evoluzione transitano convulse sullo schermo della sfera, adibendola a teatro di una cosmogonia in miniatura ove però è assolutamente preclusa ogni traccia umana.

Entro i margini del suo sfocato perimetro ogni oggetto vi appare attraverso una serie di contorsioni prismatiche. Ad essere così inscenata è la millimetrica calcografia di sonnolenti simulacri in cui sembra essere depositata da evi immemorabili l'incessante soliloquio della notte, traslitterata in un ricamo di crepuscolari visioni su cui la sfera è puntata come l'obiettivo di un immenso microscopio.

Nella sua mostruosità al tempo stesso sibillina e teorematica, la sfera schiude il proprio pleroma di scenografie vacanti in uno di quegli *intermundia* a cui verso la fine degli anni '60 Foucault ha dato il nome di eterotopie (1967: s. p.). Ma nelle pagine de *Lo stereoscopio dei solitari* la sfera non è l'unico esempio di questi circuiti mostruosi, che potremmo a buon diritto denominare *teratodromie*.

Leggendo la vicenda di Corfo nel testo *I cani da caccia* (2017: 31-34) ci imbattiamo in una singolarissima costruzione denominata da Wilcock *iperstanza* (31). In essa non solo è impossibile muoversi secondo una traiettoria lineare – dal momento che lo spazio è strutturato sulla base degli assiomi delle geometrie non euclidee – ma è anche impossibile distinguere il pavimento dal soffitto: priva di pareti, l'*iperstanza* è circoscritta da altre strutture cubiche incassate le une nelle altre, generando così una disposizione centrifuga di erratiche planimetrie in conflitto, le quali non smettono di squadernarsi in un grappolo di nodi modulari.

Con grande difficoltà Corfo abita questo dedalico oltretomba polidimensionale soggetto ad una endogena frattalizzazione insistita e insidiosa. Anche spostarsi nell'*iperstanza*, infatti, è pressoché impossibile: ogni passo sembra cadere nel vuoto e riportare Corfo al punto di partenza. L'unico modo per guadagnare centimetri è allora servirsi delle innumerevoli porte presenti in ogni angolo dell'*iperstanza*, sebbene non sia dato sapere ove conducano gli anditi su cui esse si aprono e si chiudono. Dietro di loro un altrove senza luogo si spalanca minaccioso e inaccessibile, esattamente come *la grande fessura* vista in precedenza.

Pertanto, perfino l'idea di abbandonare l'*iperstanza*, supponendo la possibilità di uscire accedendo ad un imponderabile fuori, soggiace per forza di cose alla ferrea irrazionalità logica con cui è stata congegnata l'intera infrastruttura teratodromica: simile pertanto ad una monade leibniziana colpita da un'incurabile claustrofobia metafisica, Corfo non ha vie di scampo e naufraga immobile in questo perverso meccano di spazi scorsoi.

Sulla base di quanto detto finora c'è almeno un altro testo che merita di essere preso in considerazione al fine di inquadrare meglio la fenomenologia del mostruoso elaborata da

Wilcock. Si tratta dello scritto che chiude *Lo stereoscopio dei solitari*, il quale reca senza dubbio un titolo densamente evocativo: *le forme nuove*. Eccone un estratto significativo:

> *per un fenomeno di evoluzione convergente abbastanza comune anche prima delle grandi esplosioni*, le nuove forme di vita tendevano per un verso o l'altro ad assomigliare a quelle antiche: c'erano forme che volavano, altre che nuotavano nei mari e nei fiumi, altre che scivolavano velocemente sui ghiacci sopra i pattini di legno, ma il legno era quello proprio; altre rotolavano con leggerezza nei deserti e sulle saline; molte erano parassitiche, e una di queste particolarmente malvagia e ingegnosa: d'estate si arrampicava faticosamente in cima ai monti, lì aspettava la stagione fredda, poi si arrotolava nella neve a guisa di palla e si lasciava cadere per il pendio, ingrossandosi in questo modo fino a diventare strumento pauroso di distruzione e piombare infine con grande strepito *sulle mandrie di piante che pascolavano inermi nella valle, dei succhi vitali dei quali la palla si nutriva*. (180)

Anche in questo caso l'autore recupera e rimaneggia in modo molto originale un ricco plesso di questioni che hanno contraddistinto la sua produzione precedente (1992: 30, 45, 110). Egli ci colloca così al centro di un ossificato scenario post-nucleare, in seno al quale ogni minima componente, dalla terra all'acqua fino all'aria, è percorsa dai brividi e dagli spasmi di un'intensa radioattività. Le distinzioni tra i tre regni sono state azzerate e nulla è sopravvissuto nelle sue caratteristiche note. Persino i funghi sono stati spazzati via, annichiliti fino all'estinzione totale degli ultimi esemplari (Martin, 2019: 235-242).

Ma ciò non comporta in alcun modo la fine della vita stessa. Essa non solo perdura oltre questo agglutinante sterminio inoculato nelle fibre stesse di tutto ciò che appartiene alla sfera del biologico, ma inizia anche a riorganizzarsi in maniera sotterranea in preda ad una febbrile propulsione metamorfica, nel cui vorace ribollire germinano imprevedibili sporulazioni di viventi (Canguilhem, 1962: s. p.). Ognuno di essi è nato da una sorta di straripante precipitato anamorfico di altre specie che esso assorbe e riplasma nel proprio corrotto codice genetico (Wilcock, 2017: 181).

Nell'intervallo di questo sterminato frangente teratogonico ecco fiorire allora un'ebbra effervescenza di spastici abomini sciamanti dalle crepe dell'infeconda crosta terrestre, sotto le degenerate sembianze di abortiti deragliamenti morfologici a cui persino tentare di dare un nome o una definizione risulta del tutto impossibile. Spoglie plananti di membranosi glomeruli pluricelullari innervati da ininterrotti tremiti epiteliali popolano l'agonizzante paesaggio che fa da sfondo a questa genesi integralmente apocalittica (Martin, 2019: 243-253).

I nuovi esseri che si propagano in queste plaghe anteriori ad ogni idea di tempo si profilano come impalpabili e suppuranti macerie organiche vegetanti in un mondo definitivamente defunto, dove la vita si manifesta sotto gli aspetti di creature senza domani inchiodate ad un presente già ampiamente trapassato, sorte nello spazio di un giorno e già prossime ad essere risucchiate nel gorgo di un divenire destinato ad esaurirsi senza scopo.

Precarie e tenaci, delicate neoplasie sovradimensionate sono eruttate fuori dal suolo e dalle acque (Wilcock, 2017: 181) a getto continuo, finendo con l'infestare questo interminabile precambriano squassato da un magmatico dinamismo teratogeno su cui brilla irrancidita la luce di un verminoso sole cadaverico.

4. Il mostro, un *être labyrinthé*[1]

Avviandoci verso le battute finali di questo scritto non ci resta che soffermarci sull'ultimo testo di Wilcock, *Il libro dei mostri*, terminato poco prima della morte e uscito postumo, sempre presso Adelphi, nel 1978. La parabola compiuta dell'autore argentino si chiude con una sorta di struggente ed ironico canto d'amore per tutto ciò che appartiene al mostruoso.

Il volume ricalca l'articolazione dei testi precedenti: in esso, infatti, troviamo sessantadue ritratti di figure che d'improvviso vedono alterata la loro precaria fisionomia umana a causa di una serie di inspiegabili mutazioni le quali iniziano a manifestarsi nel loro corpo.

Quest'ultima raccolta prosegue la linea di riflessione che abbiamo cercato di interrogare rileggendo *Le forme nuove* e soprattutto, a nostro giudizio, ne perfeziona alcuni aspetti salienti. In esso incontriamo soprattutto tre tipi differenti di processi che coinvolgono i personaggi, i quali sembrano provenire attraverso una derivazione diretta dall'utero infetto delle creature informi incontrate alla fine de *Lo stereoscopio dei solitari*. Ma quali sono queste tre tipologie di processi? Per motivi di esposizione li presenteremo qui di seguito, commentando alcuni estratti a titolo esemplificativo.

A) Il mostruoso come *décorporation* (Martin, 1995: 203)

Esaminando la vicenda di Rapimio abbiamo già avuto modo di vedere come la perdita totale del corpo sia uno dei primi segni chiamati a decretare l'accesso dell'uomo nella sfera del mostruoso (Ancet, 2006: 97-99). Alla luce di ciò possiamo ora proseguire le nostre riflessioni ed affermare che proprio per tale ragione in questo ultimo scritto ciò che abbiamo deciso di chiamare *décorporation* non è soltanto una delle numerose costanti che ritornano in accezioni sempre variate nel corso del testo, ma è anche uno dei nuclei concettuali più pregnanti di tutto il volume e forse dell'intero universo wilcockiano[2].

La *décorporation* ne *Il libro dei mostri* si sviluppa infatti secondo una molteplicità pressoché indefinita di declinazioni diverse. Incontriamo così il caso di Severo Carnio (2019: 136), il cui corpo trasuda uno strano liquido giallognolo simile ad urina. Dietro di sé egli lascia orribili pozze in cui egli riflettendosi può scorgere il proprio aspetto deforme, in tutto simile ad un gracile feto sproporzionato che passa il tempo a leccarsi di dosso le gocce delle proprie involontarie minzioni cutanee.

La caratteristica di Pino Scarro (125) invece è quella di avere l'epidermide completamente trasparente: osservarlo significa scorgere senza problemi il disegno nitido e dettagliato del suo scheletro in movimento, attorno al quale si avvolgono ancora alcuni sfibrati filamenti di muscoli o tendini. Ma certo il caso di *décorporation* più inquietante è quello presentato da Caro Addobbone, il quale

[1] Bachelard, 1948: 210.

[2] Wilcock poteva trovare un esempio magistrale di *décorporation* proprio nel *Finnegans Wake*, opera che lo scrittore argentino stava traducendo negli ultimi anni di vita: «il corredo corporale di Schem, a quanto pare, comprendeva un cranio tagliato con l'ascia, un ottavo occhio di triglia, due bruchi nel naso, un braccio intirizzito nella manica, quarantadue peli via dalla sua non-corona, diciotto per beffargli il labbro, un trio di barbigli che gli spuntavano dal mento megageggio (creatura di una carpa), la spalla manca più alta della retta, tutto orecchie, una lingua artificiale con un ricciolo naturale, neanche un piede su cui reggersi, una manciata di pollici, uno stomaco cieco, un cuore sordo, un fegato fluttuante, due quinti di due natiche, un avoirdupoisante glastconiano keltico, sangue d'anguilla negli alluci freddi, una vescica tristanamente dilatata» (Joyce, 2017: 169-170).

> ha una frequenza naturale di novanta vibrazioni al minuto: non troppo veloce, non più di una vibrazione al minuto e mezza al secondo […]. La vibrazione di Addobbone non presenta logicamente la stessa ampiezza a tutti i livelli del corpo. Supponiamo che il pittore sia in piedi: questi piedi sono abbastanza saldi sul pavimento, altrimenti l'insieme non sarebbe stabile. La vibrazione comincia a farsi visibile all'altezza dei ginocchi; è più marcata all'altezza del ventre e al livello della testa diventa prepotente; le mani, poi, sono un vero fruscio. (85-86)

Dal punto di vista somatico Addobbone non ha più un profilo proprio. Egli è divenuto a tutti gli effetti una variabile fisica che può essere solo misurata sulla base delle oscillazioni subite dalle sue frequenze. Il corpo è uno spostamento sempre più rapido delle varie membra le quali, a causa dell'incontenibile sollecitazione ondulatoria che le anima, svaniscono in una sibilante nubecola grigiastra, inarrestabile nel suo movimento vibratorio.

La *décorporation* in Wilcock funziona quindi secondo una duplice matrice di scomposizione organica: *in primis* il corpo è affetto da imprevedibili fenomeni anomali che lo sfigurano irreparabilmente nelle sue funzionalità proprie: le mani di Addobbone, per esempio, non possono più afferrare nulla, tramutate in inutili ventagli soggetti ad un moto rapidissimo. O ancora, a Busso Targo (123) nel giro di una notte si sono dischiuse delle pupille senza ciglia nella carne dei polpastrelli, mentre Melo Merlino, in tutto simile a «certi pesci dell'abisso» (107-108), ha scoperto per caso di avere la capacità di rendersi fluorescente. Egli emana così un lucore denso e pastoso, talmente acuto da averlo spinto a girare nudo per la città, simile a una sorta di fioca cometa dalle vaghe sembianze umanoidi.

In secondo luogo, la *décorporation* interviene in modo tale da modificare a tal punto il corpo del personaggio descritto che questo inizia a delinearsi già come un terreno in cui potranno allignare i germi mostruosi di formazioni minerali, vegetali, animali, le quali si agitano sotto la superficie delle sue membra come spettrali ipotesi epigenetiche per troppo rimaste inesplicate. Accediamo così al secondo tipo di processo teratomorfo.

B) Il mostruoso come *parassitologia* (Serres, 1977: 193)

Per illustrare al meglio questa seconda occorrenza di mostruoso è necessario esaminare il caso di Fermo Zeschi (2019: 68-69), il quale da un giorno all'altro ha iniziato a ricoprirsi di placche ossee e chitinose, in una proliferazione inarrestabile e sempre più serrata di cartilagini dure e coriacee, che lo rendono simile ad un oggetto preistorico in grado solo di respirare, perdutamente imbozzolato dentro un nodoso esoscheletro generato dal suo corpo attraverso un'auto-produzione involontaria e spontanea di escrescenze prive di ogni ragion d'essere.

E ancora, si prenda in considerazione la vicenda che è toccata in sorte al musicista Amelio Sligo (91-92), all'interno del corpo del quale è rimasto appena qualcosa di riconoscibile, dal momento che la sua pelle ha iniziato a secernere una rosea sostanza schiumosa che lo avvolge interamente, fino ad incapsulare anche la testa in uno denso cappuccio di bave. L'uomo è così scomparso dentro una spessa guaina di succhi e linfe para-vegetali, rappresi fino a renderlo simile ad un insetto intrappolato in una lacrima di resina.

Amelio Sligo da allora vive così, probabilmente mutando ininterrottamente forma all'interno del suo impenetrabile guscio di secrezioni organiche, le quali hanno finito per diventare il molle mausoleo in cui il suo corpo è già sepolto, pur essendo ancora in vita. Esattamente come accade al disc-jockey Nuno Tuno, che inizia a sbavarsi addosso, rimanendo imprigionato dentro una viscida guaina simile a una crisalide:

> questa bava che ormai lo ricopriva dalla testa ai piedi si andava intanto raffreddando e solidificando in una cuticola protettiva che lo rinchiudeva tutto intero tranne un buco per la bocca, alla maniera di una pupa. Nuno Tuno rimase in uno stato quiescente lì nello sgabuzzino con gli arti saldati alle pareti del corpo e la tunica sempre più sclerificata, ma dopo qualche giorno si vide che si era appeso con la testa all'ingiù mediante un complesso di uncinetti, detto cremaster, a un supporto tappezzato di seta e di fili serici come quelli che avvolgevano il suo bozzolo e lo tenevano stretto. (130)

Abbiamo deciso di parlare di *parassitologia* perché il mostruoso messo in campo da Wilcock in questi casi si concretizza in un intrusivo processo di contaminazione obliqua tra organismi profondamente differenti tra loro. La componente umana è esposta ad un assedio sempre più pressante e soffocante, fino ad essere del tutto sfigurata prima e cancellata poi dall'avanzata progressiva e irresistibile di fermentanti concrezioni che possono essere lette come la manifestazione di quei meta-corpi visti poco sopra in relazione a *Patologie della noia*.

Se infatti la *décorporation* consisteva in un graduale smarrimento di ogni dato somatico, la *parassitologia* funziona secondo una diversa matrice morfologica, dal momento che dagli arti, sulle ossa, nella pelle del personaggio in questione germogliano immotivate tracce, sparuti residui, selvagge incrostazioni o incontrollate secrezioni afferenti alla fisiologia di altre creature, tanto animali quanto vegetali, che si sostanziano in corpi parziali, incompleti, lacunosi, del tutto incompatibili con quello dell'organismo ospitante, sul quale essi s'innestano dando luogo ad una sorta di transustanziazione negativa, in forza della quale il corpo umano riattraversa ontogeneticamente in senso inverso le fasi filogenetiche tramite cui è passato per pervenire allo stadio ultimale.

C) Il mostruoso come *vacuum formarum*

Ma a volte la metamorfosi improvvisa si compie anche secondo una direzione diversa. È il caso del ragioniere Anchise Scabbia, destinato a retrocedere verso una dimensione cripticamente pre-umana ove però la sua presenza sembra collocarsi perfettamente, quasi adombrando l'immagine rapinosa e ferale di una sinistra ierofania. Arriviamo così alla terza ed ultima fattispecie di mostruoso. Leggiamo a tal proposito questo passaggio:

> il ragionier Anchise Scabbia riposa sopra il mondo, che è diventato un unico mare, radioso come un cigno. Immobile, si direbbe una montagna; immerso a metà, galleggia sull'acqua come una nuvola galleggia in aria, come un iceberg, irradiando energia luminosa, simile al sole con i suoi raggi, sveglio nella notte, splendente, tutto illuminando con la forza della sua luce. Sulle acque primigenie, riposa la forma elementare del suo essere, nella sua piena figura d'uomo; come un gigante addormentato, disteso sulle spire di un serpente, che è l'aspetto animale della sua persona. (42-43)

Se la prima tipologia di mostruoso intaccava direttamente la compagine somatica ed il secondo tipo interveniva su quest'ultima facendone il terreno di scontro tra flussi incontrollati di ibridazioni selvagge, questa terza fattispecie, come è possibile evincere già dal nome scelto, va ancora oltre: il soggetto si offre al nostro sguardo sotto le forme di un vero e proprio capriccio teologale (27) ed ontologico.

In essa non si registra più soltanto una semplice eliminazione del corpo. Quest'ultimo ora è interessato dalle incursioni di una brutale energia biogenetica che, affiorando silenziosa e incontenibile dal suo brancolante sottosuolo organico, lo smembra aggredendolo

surrettiziamente dall'interno, così che il contraccolpo teratogonico si riverbera su tutto ciò che circonda la figura in questione. Come già visto con *Le forme nuove*, l'autore argentino tocca qui il punto più alto della sua neo-paradossografia sperimentale, la quale ci espone violentemente ad un'ottenebrante cosmologia negativa.

L'universo stesso è trasfigurato in un palpebrante plasma seminale in cui ogni embrione che vediamo galleggiarvi è la rovina urlante di una precedente genesi durata il tempo di un istante e subito precipitata nuovamente in un insonne marasma di vaneggianti vicissitudini morfologiche: ecco allora diffondersi illimitata una calligrafica fungazione di tremule antenne spuntate dentro esofagi ostruiti dall'assieparvisi di vibranti elitre trascinate da venti primigeni, i quali portano i cancerogeni pollini di morule abortite in una catatonica spirale di ellittici anancasmi riproduttivi.

Ogni singolo corpo è uno screpolarsi di crateri in cui ronzano fitti alveari di viscere reciprocamente repulsive, invase da un vischioso carnevale di muchi antropofagi, di encefali dai tentacolati lobi frontali, di antere ove galleggiano grumi di ommatidi, fino a culminare in un'osmotica cristallografia di reticolari collassi incrociati, tutti cospiranti verso l'uomo, concepito qui in ultima istanza quale invertebrato grado zero del mostruoso (Canguilhem, 1962: s. p.).

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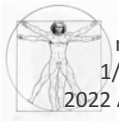

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Newspeak, the Linguistic Monster in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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Power is power over human beings.
Over the body – but, above all, over the mind.
Power over matter – external reality, as
you would call it – is not important. (...) We
control matter because we control the mind.
Reality is inside the skull.
(Orwell, 2008: 333)

Keywords

dystopias; lexicology; linguistic determinism; manipulation through language; Newspeak.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is his most important work, one which also enjoys undiminished popularity and political relevance. This dystopia, which is a novel of ideas, is populated with monsters, the proponents of the tyrannical regime of Oceania, who aimed at absolute control not only of people's bodies, but also of their minds, mainly through the 'rationalized' artificial language called Newspeak, which was meant to make all other forms of thought impossible. The importance of Newspeak in the construction of the argument of this novel is not only literary, but also linguistic; thus, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is also considered Orwell's chief work of linguistics, one which has had lexicological effects in inspiring a host of further creations including *doublespeak*, *teenspeak* and *nukespeak*, besides the popularization of several slogans, including 'Big Brother is watching you'. In fact, language was one of Orwell's major concerns. This paper argues that from a linguistic viewpoint Newspeak is a monster in itself, completely frozen as it is, immune to change and other semantic processes, thus going against the principles on which any natural language is based.

Introduction

In 1948, during that grim decade, seriously ill with tuberculosis and depressed, George Orwell was undergoing treatment at Barnhill, an isolated cottage on the island of Jura, off the north coasts of Scotland. The room in which Orwell wrote his last and most famous book can still be visited today. The landscape which he contemplated through its small window was the backdrop against which the great writer struggled to put down on paper this most sombre work. Of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, just after it succeeded, he said: "It wouldn't have been so gloomy if I hadn't been so ill" (Inglis & Spear, 1958: 658). Orwell did not live to see the enormous success of his last novel, as he never left the hospital, where he died in 1950. In English literature, Orwell is an example of the politically committed intellectual and one

of the most brilliant social critics. Anthony Burgess, in his inimitable style, characterizes Orwell in these words: "a born radical, champion of the small man who is 'pushed around' by bosses of all denominations and something of Swift's 'savage indignation' as well as his humanitarianism is to be found in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (1974: 223). Both these novels, as most of Orwell's essays, continue to appeal to young people in particular.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948)**

Nineteen Eighty-Four, first published by Secker & Warburg in 1949 and which has exceeded 15 million copies sold worldwide, is the best example of the novel as a vehicle for ideas, such ideas which were clearly expressed in the essay "Why Write", where Orwell wrote that his foremost intention was to turn political discourse into an art. Orwell was mainly preoccupied with construction and language issues – "good prose is like a window-pane" (1962: 167), while simplicity and clarity must characterize any work of fiction if it is to become an effective communication tool. In another essay, "Politics and the English Language" of 1946, he is concerned with "the vagueness and sheer incompetence of modern English prose" (321) and uses a series of Lockeian oppositions to advocate the language of personal experience and the concrete, insisting that a word is chosen for its meaning, not for its verbal felicity. "Foolish thoughts" and "ugly, inaccurate language" (323) feed off each other. "Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (335). We may note that "Politics and the English Language" is as accurate and relevant today as it was on 1946. Similarly, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* equates jargon with corrupt power. George Orwell claimed that "in our age there is no keeping out of politics. All issues are political issues" (1946: 154). Currently, the adjective Orwellian describes totalitarian and authoritarian social practices, alongside several other expressions, such as "Big Brother", "Thought Police", "Two Minutes Hate", "Room 101", "memory hole", "Newspeak", "doublethink", "unperson" and "thought crime".

The opening sequence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of the most famous in literature: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen". The allusions are clear. April from Chaucer's 'showres soote' to Eliot's *Waste Land*. David Lodge remarks that "It's the anomalous word 'thirteen' that tells us with wonderful economy that a very different experience is in store" (1992: 135). Later we learn that the "bright cold day" is 4 April 1984, the day when the main character, Winston Smith, begins his diary. His keeping a diary is the first step to his becoming Winston Smith, rather than Citizen 6079 Smith W.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopia or anti-utopia, the original title of which was "The Last Man in Europe", probably inspired by Winston Churchill, widely considered Europe's last defender in WW2, before the American intervention. Written in 1948 in the above-mentioned dire circumstances, it describes Britain (called Oceania) following forty years of totalitarian dictatorship, evincing features of communism and fascism – a police state where terror is the rule. In Oceania, "the Party", a cadre of megalomaniacal despots, wields absolute power. This regime has destroyed society as we know it, setting children against parents and wives against husbands, enforcing unwavering loyalty to "Big Brother", the potentate whose Stalin-like countenance stares out balefully from posters no one can avoid" (Stern, 2018). The portraits of the dictator known by the oppressed population as Big Brother dominate all public spaces – "Big Brother is watching you". Inside their homes, the citizens are constantly watched by a camera, while children are encouraged to inform on their parents. The Thought Police

promptly cracks down and amends all deliberate or unintentional transgressions of the totalitarian rules: "A totalitarian country is one where everything that is not prohibited is compulsory" (Orwell, 1962: 336). Orwell himself described his novel as a parody (Crick, 1980: 565–566), while Pimlott, in his 1989 introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, described it "as a non-fiction essay disguised as horror-comic fiction" (1989: viii). The main means of control of society in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is Newspeak.

Besides the thought control of all citizens, the authorities are engaged in rewriting history in accordance with party precepts. The main character, Winston Smith, "obviously named for Winston Churchill" (Lodge, 1992: 136), is an intellectual party member, entrusted with the manipulation of facts. One day, he receives an assignment (always in Newspeak): "times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling". Orwell translates: "The reporting for Big Brother's Order for the Day in the *Times* of December 3rd 1983 is extremely unsatisfactory and makes references to nonexistent persons. Rewrite it in full and submit your draft to higher authority before filing" (2008: 49). Winston Smith later rebels against this activity and plots to destroy the system, but in the end is arrested and brain-washed into conformity. The true merit of the novel resides in its description and detailing of the political mechanisms of totalitarianism, an analysis which continues to be considered relevant in contemporary society. Lyotard's *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1992), for example, imagines the continuing truth of Orwell's *1984* to consist in the fragility of individuality and creativity in a world of organised communication systems reproducing dominant discourses.

From a stylistic perspective, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains more than one type of discourse: the complex one of Winston Smith, which is made up of slogans and Newspeak fragments from the Ministry of Truth, excerpts from his personal diary as well as the song of the prole; Emmanuel Goldstein's "Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" and the Appendix on "The Principles of Newspeak"; all are integrated by the omniscient 3rd person narrative, made up of short, concrete sentences, in the journalistic style. Orwell was aiming at the "zero writing degree" (*le degré zero de l'écriture*), "a styleless style effacing itself before the directly experienced reality" (Easthope, 1999: 158). This is writing which foregrounds its own textuality.

Newspeak, the Linguistic Monster

The Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of Newspeak is "propagandistic language marked by euphemism, circumlocution, and the inversion of customary meanings". Lexicographer John Ayto's Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Words defines Newspeak as "the name of the artificial language used for official communications in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, often applied to any corrupt form of English, especially the propagandist and ambiguous language of some politicians, broadcasters, etc. It became the inspiration for a range of neologisms ending in *-speak*" (1999: 290), including *doublespeak,* a blend of *Newspeak* and *Doublethink*, which describes any word which deliberately hides or changes a meaning in order to achieve an ulterior motive. *Newspeak* itself has become a term in the language at large for misleading (especially political) jargon, and is the source for a large number of words modelled on it, such as *nukespeak* and *teenspeak* (McArthur, 1992: 693).

In the text of his novel, Orwell describes Newspeak at great length:

> It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. To give a single example. The word FREE still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as 'This dog is free from lice' or 'This field is free from weeds'. It could not be used in its old sense of 'politically free' or 'intellectually free' since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless. (2008: 377)

The final form of Newspeak was a work in progress, since "an enormous team of experts", including Syme, were working on the 11th edition of the Newspeak dictionary, with its final implementation completed by the year 2050. It is important to note that Newspeak is presented in the novel as being a work in the making, and no extended example of its use appears anywhere. It is mainly introduced by Syme, and by Orwell himself at the end of the novel. Thus the reader may well wonder how the people of Oceania were supposed to use a language which existed only in written form. The Newspeak language engineers completely ignored both the diachronic and the social aspect of any language. Newspeak was completely frozen, immune to change and other semantic processes, thus going against the principles on which any natural language is based. These features in themselves helped make Newspeak a linguistic monster. The etymology of the word *monster* shows that it is derived from the Latin *monstrum*, a portent.

According to American linguist Whitney F. Bolton, "Orwell's inspiration for Newspeak probably included the artificial languages in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Evgeny I. Zamyatin's *We* (1920-1921), C. K. Ogden's *Basic English* (1930), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and H. G. Wells' *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933)" (1992a: 128). Indeed, Marx identified the function of words with that of ideology in society, namely the distortion of reality, while viewing language as hypocritical phraseology. No wonder then that he exalted labour against intellectual pursuit and believed language to hamper thinking. Hannah Arendt later observed that "violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power" (1970: 128).

In the Appendix, entitled 'The Principle of Newspeak', Orwell further explains that "the purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (Orwell, 2008: 376-377). Syme asks Winston Smith: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is narrow the range of thought? (…) Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller" (2008: 67). "Most words in Newspeak are removed by selecting a basic term, for example 'good', rather than the possible range of 'fine, nice, excellent, ok, well, lovely, pleasant, superb, brilliant' and so on) and then allowing a small set of very regular inflections ('gooder, ungood, goodest, plusgood, doubleplusgood')" (Mullany & Stockwell, 2010: 112).

Newspeak Vocabulary

Newspeak words were divided into three distinct classes, known as the A vocabulary, the B vocabulary (also called compound words), and the C vocabulary. "The A vocabulary consisted of the words needed for the business of everyday life – for such things as eating, drinking, working, putting on one's clothes, going up and down stairs, riding in vehicles, gardening, cooking, and the like. (...) It was intended only to express simple, purposive thoughts, usually involving concrete objects or physical actions" (Orwell, 2008: 378). "The B vocabulary consisted of words which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes: words, that is to say, which not only had in every case a political implication, but were intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them. Without a full understanding of the principles of Ingsoc it was difficult to use these words correctly" (381). "The C vocabulary was supplementary to the others and consisted entirely of scientific and technical terms. These resembled the scientific terms in use today, and were constructed from the same roots, but the usual care was taken to define them rigidly and strip them of undesirable meanings". And Orwell tersely concludes his presentation of the three vocabularies of Newspeak with these words:

> From the foregoing account it will be seen that in Newspeak the expression of unorthodox opinions, above a very low level, was well-nigh impossible. It was of course possible to utter heresies of a very crude kind, a species of blasphemy. It would have been possible, for example, to say BIG BROTHER IS UNGOOD. But this statement, which to an orthodox ear merely conveyed a self-evident absurdity, could not have been sustained by reasoned argument, because the necessary words were not available. (2008: 389)

Thus, Newspeak is reconstructed or 'rationalized' language, which is thus made controllable. Words are formed by means of prefixes, e.g. *minitruth, doubleplusgood* vs *doubleplusungood*, as well as compounding and abbreviation, e.g. *miniluv, doublethink* ('accepting contradictory beliefs'), *Ingsoc* ('English socialism'), *thinkpol* ('think police'), *crimethink* ('thought crime'), *Pornosec* (the pornography section of the Ministry of Truth), *ficdep* (fiction department), *recdep* (Records Department), *prolefeed, duckspeak* or *blackwhite*, mainly lexicological blends". Do you know the Newspeak word *goodthinkful*? Meaning naturally orthodox, incapable of thinking a bad thought?"... Winston asks Julia (166). David Crystal aptly refers to these creations as "Orwellian Compoundspeak" (1995: 135). In the second paragraph of the book, Orwell uses a revealing compound – *Hate Week*, besides the reference to the enormous coloured poster with the words BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU (2008: 3). These are the only two unfamiliar details in what appears to be an ordinary day in the contemporary world. The use of compound words and abbreviations helped "separate the words from their conscious and unconscious connotations" (Shadi, 2018: 185). The meanings of all Newspeak words are ideological.

It must be noted that while these techniques of word-formation are typical of English vocabulary, words composed of truncated syllables appear to have been popular in totalitarian regimes. The stems from which these lexical creations were formed are to a great extent Germanic, as a reflection of Orwell's strong ideas concerning the modern trend to replace Anglo-Saxon words with classical ones. Another issue addressed by Newspeak is that of political euphemism, seen as a method of concealing truth, as The Ministry of Truth is in fact

The Ministry of Propaganda and The Ministry of Love is The Ministry of Repression. The standardization of language entails the standardization of thought. Moreover, Newspeak is also an example of linguistic determinism. Claudio Magris, the Italian scholar of German literature and literary historian of Central Europe, describes this process as "massacrer la langue": "rouillant ainsi les cartes, intervertissant les rôles des victimes et des bourreaux, abolissant les distinctions et les hiérarchies en de crapuleuses orgies de concepts et de sentiments qui altèrent la vérité" (2001: 41). Such standardization was in fact nothing less than totalitarian prescriptivism:

> 'The Eleventh Edition is the definitive edition', he said.
> 'We're getting the language into its final shape – the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else. When we've finished with it, people like you will have to learn it all over again. You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050 (…) 'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. (Orwell, 2008: 65-66)

Orwell himself remarked in the Appendix that "telescoped words and phrases had been one of the characteristic features of political language; and it had been noticed that the tendency to use abbreviations of this kind was most marked in totalitarian countries and totalitarian organizations" and also that abbreviations are effective in the reorganization of language because they remove the full meaning and context that nonabbreviated words carry. In addition, abbreviations and shortened words suggest "a tightly-knit organization and a well-defined body of doctrine" (386-387).

Newspeak Grammar

"The grammar of Newspeak had two outstanding peculiarities. The first of these was an almost complete interchangeability between different parts of speech. Any word in the language (in principle this applied even to very abstract words such as IF or WHEN). (…) The word THOUGHT, for example, did not exist in Newspeak. Its place was taken by THINK, which did duty for both noun and verb" (378-379).

> The second distinguishing mark of Newspeak grammar was its regularity. Subject to a few exceptions which are mentioned below all inflexions followed the same rules. Thus, in all verbs the preterite and the past participle were the same and ended in -ED. The preterite of STEAL was STEALED, the preterite of THINK was THINKED, and so on throughout the language. (…) The only classes of words that were still allowed to inflect irregularly were the pronouns, the relatives, the demonstrative adjectives, and the auxiliary verbs. (380-381)

"*WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH*" were the three slogans of the party Ingsoc, as detailed by Goldstein in his theory. "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (2008:103). The word *free* only existed in Newspeak to communicate the absence of something, e.g. "The dog is

free from lice" or "This field is free of weeds". It may be noted that later O'Brien casually reveals that he together with a committee wrote Goldstein's book. No references to the syntax of Newspeak are made.

Thus, Newspeak is "English re-engineered through massive vocabulary reduction and shifts of meaning. It is controlled by the Party, whose head, Big Brother, is a symbol rather than an actual person. A small Inner Party use Newspeak to control the minds of the larger Outer Party" (Joseph, 2004: 352). This scenario is well-known to the former citizens of communist states (see, for example, '*newspeak-ul ceaușist*' in Blaga, 2007: 353) as well as '*nouvorba*' (Zafiu, 2007: 16), besides Young (1991). However, the practical experience of language which lies at the heart of the activity of all human beings means that every speaker is steeped in conscious and unconscious metalinguistic activity, including wordplay and verbal play in all forms. Language play in all its forms appears to be one of the central functions of language, rendered impossible by the tyrannical restrictions of Newspeak.

The principles on which Newspeak is based can be further argued to underlie the present-day moves towards 'political correctness' in language: ""The new McCarthyism', 'thought police', 'Orwellian', 'Fascist' and 'totalitarianism', among the favoured terms, conjure up a *Nineteen Eighty-Four* world of inexpressibility, constriction, and savage repression" (Lakoff, 2000: 98). In fact, Noam Chomsky has addressed 'Orwell's problem' from the viewpoint of the limits of knowledge: how it is possible for us to know so little when we have at our disposal so much information; this limitation being an effect of propaganda through language (see 1988, interviews in *Language and Politics*).

Roger Fowler has noted that "the proponents of Newspeak language take an extreme nominalist position" (1995: 225). A nominalist position claims that no universal or abstract concepts exist outside the mind. Rather, it makes sense to talk of mere names without a corresponding reality, or put even more simply: meanings derive from words, not the other way around – as would be a fundamentally 'realist' view of language.

The ending of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* like that of *Animal Farm*, has been described as amounting to "an affirmation that endeavour and effort are futile", as supported by "a set of assumptions common to Orwell's work generally, two of which can be stated bluntly: that human beings betray each other, and that among the species generally considered, intellectuals can be relied upon to be not only worse than most but the prime enemy" (Jacobs, 1994: 237).

Conclusions

Nineteen Eighty-Four is widely considered Orwell's major work on language.

The first linguist to have noted Orwell's relevance to understanding language was J. R. Firth, whose work was continued and expanded by M. A. K. Halliday, who outlined a structuralist model of text analysis based on the identification of the ideology which underlies the use of language. Halliday's systemic-functional grammar paved the way for Roger Fowler's 'critical linguistics' (Fowler *et al.*, 1979) and 'critical discourse analysis'. Noam Chomsky too has claimed Orwell as one of his intellectual influences.

Edelman's empirical study of political language and symbols drew upon Orwell's ideas, concluding that "both the perception of fact and value connotations hinge on the adequacy and character of the available vocabulary" (1964: 120).

An underlying principle of Newspeak is that anything that cannot be said cannot be thought either. A question prompted by this principle is to what extent our conception of reality is defined by language, a question addressed by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the extreme

form of which is known as linguistic determinism. The hypothesis, now widely accepted in its weaker ('linguistic relativism' form), holds that the semantic structure of a person's native language either determines or limits the ways in which they are able to form conceptions of the world in which they live, or, simply put, our language determines our perception of the world. This idea is clearly expressed by Orwell in the text of his novel in the quote on page 377 of the 2008 edition. The principles of Newspeak are grounded in this hypothesis.

Newspeak is the 20th century's literary archetype of linguistic terror. The Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not evil simply because it is artificial, but because its goals are untruth and mind control, and because its means to this end are the suppression of words for forbidden concepts (like *honour, justice*) and the ready conversion of parts of speech (like the verb *speak* as a noun, instead of *speech).* "Orwell was in most ways a language conservative while he was a social individualist and a political adherent of 'democratic socialism', as he called it. His books sometimes champion those who speak non-standard English, but his essays severely oppose linguistic change and by implication condemn the diversity that change brings" (Bolton, 1992b: 733).

Thus Newspeak, i.e. the manipulation of and through language – is a two-step process: the basic proposition, as pointed out above, is that meanings derive from words. It follows that the Party, as the sole creator and regulator of Newspeak language, also will determine meanings, thereby excluding all of which may conflict with the principles of their rule. To this nominalist position, the proponents of Newspeak add an extreme determinism: they believe that thoughts are controlled by words (Fowler, 1995: 225). The words of the Party, which are the only words available to the Oceanic language community, will therefore reside in the minds of the Party members, dictating the way they think and express themselves. Language in Oceania thus functions to isolate not only the individual but also, by denying the citizens any knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, the whole community as a group. When Newspeak has brainwashed the people of Oceania into complete servility, persons will have been reduced to mouths that utter, incapable of any practical metalinguistic activity.

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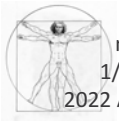

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Dos pequeños "monstruos" en las novelas contemporáneas de Benito Pérez Galdós

Two "Little Monsters" in Benito Pérez Galdós's Contemporary Novels

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Palabras clave

Galdós; realismo; niños deformes; Torquemada; *La desheredada*.

No hacemos más que decir un truismo al afirmar que Benito Pérez Galdós vivió para contar las vivencias más nimias de sus contemporáneos, de manera que sus obras constituyen la historia novelada de la España del siglo XIX. Para el escritor preclaro, la novela es "imagen de la vida", como él mismo confesaba en su discurso de ingreso en la Real Academia. Como aspiraba a dejar testimonio riguroso y fiel de la vida de sus contemporáneos, Galdós tuvo que conceder peculiar importancia a los habitantes menores de edad de la España de su época. Hay numerosos niños en las novelas de Galdós, niños de todas las edades y de todas las condiciones sociales, que se comportan como los niños de la vida real y tienen las mismas preocupaciones que sus modelos de carne y hueso. Entre ellos hay dos niños deformes, dos pequeños "monstruos", cuya deformidad aflige enormemente a sus madres. El primero es Valentín, el hijo que Torquemada tiene con Fidela en *Torquemada y San Pedro*, y el segundo es "Riquín", el hijo que Isidora Rufete tiene con Joaquín Pez en *La desheredada*.

Keywords

Galdós; realism; deformed children; Torquemada; *La desheredada*.

Needless to say, Benito Pérez Galdós lived to recount the most trivial experiences of his contemporaries, so that his works constitute the fictionalised history of Spain in the 19th century. For the illustrious writer, the novel is an "image of life", as he himself confessed in his admission speech at the Royal Academy. As he aspired to leave a rigorous and faithful testimony of the life of his contemporaries, Galdós had to grant particular importance to the smaller inhabitants of the Spain of his time. There are numerous children in Galdós's novels, children of all ages and from all walks of life, who behave like children in real life and have the same concerns as their flesh and blood models. Among them there are two deformed children, two little "monsters", whose deformity greatly afflicts their mothers. The first is Valentín, the son that Torquemada has with Fidela in *Torquemada and San Pedro*, and the second is "Riquín", the son that Isidora Rufete has with Joaquín Pez in *La desheredada*.

1. La preocupación de Galdós por la sociedad y el mundo infantil

No hay nada en la sociedad española que se le escape al "verdadero creador de lo que entendemos por realismo moderno en la novela española" (Del Río, 1982: 295). No es el único representante de esta corriente literaria en España, pero "fue el primero en asimilar la lección de Balzac y de Dickens, al par que supo dar sentido nuevo al retorno hacia el antiguo realismo español, apropiándose lo substancial y rehuyendo la trampa de la imitación externa…" (295).

No hacemos más que decir un truismo al afirmar que Benito Pérez Galdós vivió para contar las vivencias más nimias de sus contemporáneos, de manera que sus obras constituyen la historia novelada de la España del siglo XIX. Para el escritor preclaro, la novela es "imagen de la vida", como él mismo confesaba en su discurso de ingreso en la Real Academia (1897).

En las novelas galdosianas aparecen reyes y aristócratas, pero el escritor está interesado sobre todo en el "pueblo, que con su miseria, sus disputas, sus dichos picantes, hacía la historia que no se escribe, como no sea por los poetas, pintores y saineteros" (Galdós, 1945: 548). La historia suele ignorar a sus propios artesanos –"no queda noticia del heroísmo individual en la historia" (Galdós, 1988: 163)– y, por eso, las novelas de Galdós son más aleccionadoras que los manuales de historia y deberían sustituirlos, según sugiere Max Aub en su *Manual de historia de la literatura española*. Además, el siglo XIX en España no fue nada sereno, un escritor académico de nuestra época y gran admirador de Galdós destaca "lo poco que los españoles nos aburrimos en él", ya que "este siglo fue la más desvergonzada cacería por el poder que, aun conociendo muchas, conoce nuestra historia" (Pérez-Reverte, 2020: 138).

Con su eterno realismo describe el autor canario la vida de los niños, revelando sin tapujos las taras de la sociedad decimonónica: la mortalidad infantil, la pobreza que a menudo obliga a los pequeños a mendigar, los maltratos infligidos en las casas o en los colegios, los desperfectos de la educación en la época...

En *Torquemada en el purgatorio*, Rafael exclama: "¡Pobrecito,… estas criaturas son tan débiles! De ciento, los noventa y ocho perecen…" (Galdós, 2019b: 426).

Asimismo, en la famosísima novela homónima, Tristana no desea tener hijos, porque los niños "se mueren todos" (Galdós, 2019c: 188); según ella, "niño nacido es niño muerto" (188).

Los que sobreviven, a menudo tienen una vida difícil, como los hijos de Caifás en *Gloria*, que van a casa de la protagonista, a pedir limosna. El lector no puede dejar de conmoverse al leer su descripción: "Ambos bajaron. En el jardín estaba D. Ángel y frente a él un lastimoso terceto de muchachos llorones, con los puños en los ojos, los sucios rostros llenos de babas y de tierra que con las lágrimas se amasaba" (Galdós, 1876-1877).

En *Misericordia*, algunos mendigos piden limosna acompañados por niños, para inspirar más lástima.

En *Torquemada en la hoguera*, el usurero decide hacer obras de caridad, para que Dios se apiade de él y salve a su hijo enfermo. Por eso, recorre ansioso las calles del centro de Madrid, en busca de pobres a quien regalar dinero. Tiene suerte, porque ahí hay varios pequeños mendigos, que esperan un alma caritativa. Entre ellos destaca "un chicuelo que estaba arrimado a la pared, con las manos a la espalda, descalzos los pies, el pescuezo envuelto en una bufanda" (Galdós 2019b: 108), que ni siquiera tiene fuerzas para abrir la boca y pedir, está muerto de frío. El usurero le da dinero y él tiende su "mano aterida" (108) para cogerlo.

Maltratos padecen muchos niños en las novelas de Galdós. En *El Doctor Centeno*, Pedro Polo es un sacerdote violento, que se dedica a la enseñanza y maltrata a los alumnos.

En *Fortunata y Jacinta* hay unos niños pobres, que no tienen juguetes y aprovechan cualquier cosa para jugar. Encuentran la tinta de Nicanora, la esposa del memorable personaje

Ido del Sagrario, y no dudan en pintarse las caras. La travesura acaba mal, puesto que sus madres los castigan cruelmente:

> En el mismo instante salió una mujeraza de la puerta más próxima, y agarrando a una de las niñas embadurnadas, le levantó las enaguas y empezó a darle tal solfa en salva la parte, que los castañetazos se oían desde el primer patio. No tardó en aparecer otra madre furiosa, que más que mujer parecía una loba, y la emprendió con otro de los mandingas a bofetada sucia, sin miedo a mancharse ella también. «Canallas, cafres, ¡cómo se han puesto!». Y al punto fueron saliendo más madres irritadas. ¡La que se armó! Pronto se vieron lágrimas resbalando sobre el betún, llanto que al punto se volvía negro. «Te voy a matar, grandísimo pillo, ladrón...». (Galdós, 1992 I: 325)

La mujer de Ido del Sagrario hace lo mismo con sus hijos: "Oyose el pie de paliza que Nicarona, hecha una veneno, estaba dando a sus hijos, y el gemir de ellos" (325).

Pero en las novelas galdosianas abundan también los momentos alegres de la vida de los niños, llenos de travesuras inocentes y ternura.

En *La familia de León Roch* hay un adorable grupo de niños curiosos y revoltosos, que, en un momento de descuido de su aya, entran al despacho del héroe y echan a perder objetos valiosos: "Tachana había traído una silla para subir a la mesa; pero antes se subió Monina, y andando a gatas sobre ella arrojó al suelo el microscopio y los demás aparatos que en la mesa había..." (Galdós, 2019a: 261).

Hay numerosos niños en las novelas de Galdós, niños de todas las edades y de todas las condiciones sociales, que se comportan como los niños de la vida real y tienen las mismas preocupaciones que sus modelos de carne y hueso. Entre ellos hay dos niños deformes, dos pequeños "monstruos", cuya deformidad entristece enormemente a sus madres.

2. Dos pequeños "monstruos" en las novelas contemporáneas

2.1. Valentín

Es el hijo que Torquemada tiene con Fidela en *Torquemada y San Pedro* (1895), novela que cierra la *Tetralogía de las Novelas de Torquemada* y narra la última parte de la vida del famoso usurero, personaje que, aunque parezca "en un comienzo una figura caricaturesca […] pronto el personaje se engrandece y escapa al estrecho ámbito de las tipologías costumbristas" (López, 2019: 27).

El usurero espera con mucha ilusión el nacimiento de este bebé, destinado a llenar el inmenso vacío que había dejado otro Valentín, engendrado por el usurero durante su primer matrimonio. Pero tanto la primera esposa como el primer Valentín estaban muertos. La pérdida de aquel hijo había enternecido al padre; en *Torquemada y San Pedro* el lector descubre un protagonista humanizado por la muerte que "entiende como inevitable, pero a la que no se resigna" (63). El primer Valentín tenía un asombroso talento en las matemáticas y sus profesores lo alababan. Torquemada lo consideraba un genio y estaba muy orgulloso de su hijo varón.

Al casarse con Fidela, Torquemada está ilusionado con tener otro hijo idéntico al primero. Se alegra enormemente al saber que Fidela le ha dado un hijo varón. "Es el mismo, el propio Valentín" (Galdós, 2019b: 404) exclama el usurero cuando, por fin, le permiten ver al recién nacido. Y añade: "¡Cuánto me quiere Dios! ¡Él me lo quitó; Él me lo vuelve a dar!" (404).

Desafortunadamente, la felicidad no le dura mucho. La reemplaza la preocupación del padre decimonónico, que teme las enfermedades infantiles, en aquel entonces mortíferas. El bebé parece frágil y raquítico. Por si fuera poco, el yerno del usurero estudia Medicina y no duda en confesar a su suegro sus convencimientos: "El chico es un fenómeno. ¿Ha reparado usted el tamaño de la cabeza, y aquellas orejas que le cuelgan como las de una liebre? Pues no han adquirido las piernas su conformidad natural, y si vive, que yo lo dudo, será patizambo" (410). El usurero reacciona con agresividad, echa de su casa al yerno.Perono puede echar también los temores que empiezan a invadirle.

Con el tiempo, el pequeño llega a ser "engaño de los padres y falsa ilusión de toda la familia" (490). Dentro de poco todos comprueban que Quevedito, el yerno de Torquemada, había tenido razón: "El crecimiento de la cabeza se inició antes de los dos años, y poco después la longitud de las orejas y la torcedura de las piernas, con la repugnancia a mantenerse derecho sobre ellas. Los ojos quedáronsele diminutos en aquella crisis de la vida, y además fríos, parados, sin ninguna viveza ni donaire gracioso. El pelo era lacio y de color enfermizo, como barbas de maíz" (490).

El segundo Valentín es una gran decepción. El niño se pasa el día "arrastrándose a cuatro patas sobre la alfombra" (489) y no hay manera de hacerle levantarse y caminar como las personas, se complace en comportarse como un cerdo: "Berreaba el chico, movía sus cuatro remos con animal deleite, echando babas de su boca, y queriendo abrazarse al suelo y hociquear en él" (489). Augusta, la amiga de su madre, trata de cogerlo en sus brazos, lo que empeora las cosas: "púsose el nene fuera de sí, dando patadas con pies y manos, que por un instante las manos más bien patas parecían, y atronó con sus chillidos la estancia, echando hacia atrás la cabeza, y apretando los dientes" (489).

No cabe duda de que es un niño esquivo, de trato difícil. Pero Augusta tampoco tiene la actitud más adecuada, puesto que el niño le repugna, y no se lo oculta en absoluto, acaba insultando al pequeño monstruo: "¡Quédate, quédate ahí en el santo suelo — le dijo Augusta —, hecho un sapo! ¡Vaya, que estás bonito! Sí, llora, llora, grandísimo mamarracho, para que te pongas más feo de lo que eres..." (489). Al percibir su agresividad, el niño contesta también con vehemencia y a su manera, con sílabas que no llegan a constituir palabras. Augusta sigue replicando con irritación: "Nunca hablarás como las personas. Parece mentira que seas hijo de tu madre, que es toda inteligencia y dulzura. ¡Ay, qué lástima!" (490).

El niño rechaza el trato humano: "Difícilmente se dejaba acariciar de nadie, y sólo con su mamá era menos esquivo. Si alguien le cogía en brazos, echaba la cabeza para atrás, y con violentísimas manotadas y pataleos expresaba el afán de que le soltaran" (491). Muerde a quien le molesta, la niñera tiene las manos "acribilladas" (491). Prefiere jugar con los animales, pero los maltrata. Se comporta como los animales: "A cuatro pies, triscaba el pelo de las alfombras, como el corderillo que mordisquea la hierba menuda, y hociqueaba en todos los rincones. Estas eran sus alegrías" (491). En otra ocasión, "salió renqueando por aquellas salas, y a poco se le oyó imitando elasmático aullar de un perro enfermo que en los bajos de la casa había" (497).

Augusta le dice a Fidela, la madre de la criatura: "Allí me he encontrado a tu hijito hecho un puerco-espín" (491). Los adultos de la casa están ya hartos de las rudas travesuras del niño y dejan de prestarle atención, o a veces llegan a insultarlo. La madre misma destaca en tono burlón los defectos físicos del pequeño Valentín: "Ay, hijo mío, no abras tanto la mampara, que nos da miedo... ¿Será posible que no se te achique, en la primera crisis de la edad, ese buzón que tienes por boca? Di, diamante en bruto, ¿a quién sales tú con esa sopera?" (495). La pedagogía de nuestros tiempos no recomendaría este método de criar a los pequeños. Pero en

la época de Galdós era lo habitual. "¡El pobre!... ¡qué pena da verle tan bruto!" (491). El escritor concluye que el niño es una "triste y desconsoladora alimaña" (491). Tiene gustos muy singulares: le gusta usar un látigo, con el que destroza las porcelanas finas de la casa y hiere a las personas. Por si fuera poco, quiere tomar vino.

Cuando su madre está en su lecho de muerte, el niño parece intuirlo y entenderlo, aunque se comporta a su manera:

> si al pronto se enfurruñó, porque le privaban de hacer el burro en los pasillos bajos, no tardó en avenirse con la compañía de su madre, única persona a quien solía mostrar cariño. Cansado de dar vueltas por la alcoba pegando latigazos, se hizo subir a la cama, y por ella se paseó a cuatro patas, imitando el perro y el cochino; y ya se corría hacia la cabecera para dejarse besar de su mamá, ya bajaba hasta los pies, mordisqueando la colcha, y haciendo *gru, gru*, para hacer creer a Augusta que era un terrible animalejo, que le iba a comer una mano. (514)

Sin embargo, aquel día permanece al lado de su madre y la mira de manera diferente, la mira con ternura, como presintiendo que ya no podrá mirarla.

El tiempo pasa, el niño crece, pero no recupera la apariencia humana, sino todo lo contrario: "su cabeza parecía cada vez más grande, sus patas más torcidas, sus dientes más afilados, sus hábitos más groseros, y su genio más áspero, avieso y cruel" (550). En cambio, aprende a pronunciar algunas palabras.

A punto de morirse también, Torquemada imagina el futuro de su hijo: "Y luego, en la mayor edad, el hombrecito mío ha de ser todo lo que se quiera, menos pródigo, pues de eso sí que no tiene trazas. Será cazador, y no comerá más que legumbres. Ni tendrá afición al teatro, ni a la poesía, que es por donde se pierden los hombres, y esconderá el dinero en una olla para que no lo vea ni Dios..." (605). Ese futuro se esfuerza en asegurarlo: "Para él ha de ser todo, el día en que el Señor se sirva disponer que yo suba al Cielo" (605). Como sabe que Valentín jamás será capaz de cuidarse solo, deja disposiciones muy estrictas: "Claro, con un buen consejo de familia, que cuide de alimentar al niño y tenerlo aseado, se pueden ir acumulando los intereses, y aumentar elcapital" (605).

La novela acaba con la muerte del usurero y el lector se queda sin saber qué ocurre con el hijo de éste, puesto que el autor no revela nada al respecto. El yerno de Torquemada, a quien el héroe apodaba "Quevedito", había pronosticado al niño una vida corta. Podemos imaginar que no se había equivocado. Era un niño monstruoso y privado de inteligencia, que parecía más bien un animal. Por si fuera poco, se había quedado huérfano. Por más que lo cuidaran su tía y los criados de la casa, nunca llegaría a llevar una vida normal.

2.2. "Riquín"

Es el hijo que Isidora Rufete tiene con Joaquín Pez, marqués de Saldeoro, en *La desheredada* (1881), novela en que Galdós representa "esa poderosa fuerza humana proveniente de las ilusiones y del sentir que complementa a la racional en la conciencia humana individual" (Gullón, 2018: 29). Isidora Rufete está convencida de ser descendiente de una familia noble y durante muchos años trata de obtener el reconocimiento y la herencia que se imagina que le corresponde. Pero al final verá frustradas esas esperanzas.

Provincial, muy joven, ilusionada y sin experiencia, Isidora cae fácilmente en los brazos de Joaquín Pez, el apuesto marqués de Saldeoro, quien promete ayudarla. Isidora pierde la cabeza

y acaba teniendo un hijo de él. En realidad, la madre, muy enamorada de su amante, escoge para el niño el mismo nombre del padre. El apodo cariñoso "Riquín" se debe a una tía de Isidora. Pero a Isidora le gusta el apodo y llama a su hijo "Riquín", lo que es suficiente para que el lector comprenda que Isidora sí ama a su hijo. Más tarde se indigna cuando la gente, incluso los parientes, destacan únicamente el tamaño de su cabeza y no ven las cualidades del niño: "¡Pobrecito mío! Todos han de tener que decir algo sobre si tiene la cabeza grande. Pues yo digo que la tiene toda llena de talento" (Galdós, 2018: 310).

Joaquín Pez, el padre, se desentiende completamente de su descendiente ilegítimo y la madre, que no tiene otra fuente de ingresos y necesita sobrevivir, acaba convirtiéndose en amante del político Alejandro Botín Sánchez. Pronto descubre que el nuevo amante es despótico y celoso, lo que no puede tolerar la rebelde Isidora, que prefiere la pobreza y la libertad.

Desafortunadamente, el niño es "algo monstruoso; lo que llamamos un *macrocéfalo*, es decir, que tiene la cabeza muy grande, deforme" (290). La madre no se avergüenza con él, sino todo lo contrario: pregunta al médico "si toda aquella gran testa estará llena de talento" (290). En su ignorancia, Isidora sueña con disponer de un aparato que frene el crecimiento de la cabeza del niño.

El tamaño de la cabeza no es el único defecto que tiene el pequeño, el autor apunta que "sus piernas eran cortas y débiles" (309). No obstante, el niño no deja de ser muy agradable: "Su deformidad incipiente no era tal que le privara de los encantos de la niñez, antes bien daba risa verle erguir su cabezota con cierto aire de valentía, como un hijo de Atlante predestinado a superar a su padre en la facultad de cargar grandes pesos" (306).

Por lo demás, es un niño encantador, inteligente y simpático. Juega como todos los niños y toda la familia lo ama. Hasta le aguantan golpes inocentes: "Estaba, pues, en traje talar que le arrastraba, y por los bordes de él asomaban sus patitas vacilantes. Traía empuñado en ambas manos el bastón de D. José, y caminaba derecho a *la Sanguijuelera*, todo risas y alegría, con la evidente intención de darle un palo. Ella se dejó pegar, le cogió luego en brazos y le dio tantos y tan sonoros besos, que el muchacho empezó a gruñir y a defenderse a cabezadas" (309). En otro momento, don José se muestra "fatigado de tanto andar a cuatro pies, ligeramente encendido el rostro; pero hecho todo miel, y tan risueño y bondadoso como antaño. Traía en brazos a *Riquín*, que era muy lindo, gracioso y dicharachero" (307). La novela está llena de tales momentos de felicidad familiar, como el de la mañana de San Isidro, fiesta celebrada siempre con mucha alegría en Madrid: "Don José andaba a gatas sirviendo de caballo a *Riquín*, ya vestido desde el amanecer de Dios" (355). Cuando Isidora abandona a Botín, don José carga al niño dormido y lo estrecha "entre sus brazos con ardiente cariño" (363).

Riquín es sin duda un niño sociable, que se lleva muy bien con sus primos: "*Riquín* hizo tan buenas migas con los dos chicos de Emilia, como si se hubieran criado en la misma cuna. Todo el santo día lo pasaban enredando desde la trastienda a la cocina e inventando diabluras" (397).

Isidora ama a su hijo, sobre todo porque ama también al padre y en el fondo muy tarde pierde la esperanza de llegar a ser su esposa, ya que el marqués de Saldeoro es viudo. Joaquín Pez y la herencia que ella cree que le pertenece son los sueños dorados de Isidora Rufete. Se hunde en sus ensoñaciones y se prueba bellísimos vestidos ajenos, olvidándose de su hijo, aunque muchas veces lo trata con ternura materna, el autor no deja de apuntar: "Cogió a Riquín y le hartó de besos" (310). También: "Veamos cómo pasaba el tiempo la dueña de la casa. Entre bañarse, peinarse, vestir y arreglar a *Riquín*, se le iba la mañana" (317). Aprecia a un

amante nuevo porque tiene detalles con el niño: "Una cosa me agrada de él... para que veas que todo no ha de ser malo... Quiere mucho a mi Joaquín, lo acaricia, le cuenta cuentos, lo pone a cabalgar sobre sus rodillas, le lleva dulces y juguetes..." (351).

El día de San Isidro, cuando el niño se siente mal y vomita la comida que había ingerido en la fiesta, Isidora se preocupa y llora. Sin embargo, su orgullo es más fuerte y rechaza el ofrecimiento de su amante, no acepta pasar una noche más en la casa que le había puesto Botín. Isidora se va con los suyos, pidiendo a su tío, muy resueltamente: "Cargue usted a *Riquín*. Envolvedlo bien en un mantón. Nos vamos ahora mismo" (361).

Al final, la heroína comprende que no tendrá ni a Joaquín (que vuelve de La Habana casado con otra mujer), ni la herencia que pretende (porque se demuestra que ella no es heredera legítima de los marqueses de Aransis). Por el pleito de la herencia llega a pasar una temporada en la cárcel, durante la cual recibe visitas de sus familiares con su hijo y son los únicos momentos que la reconfortan un poco. Mientras tanto, Riquín es acogido en casa de Emilia, prima de su madre, y es criado junto con los hijos de Emilia, a quien acaba considerándola madre, ya que los niños olvidan fácilmente. Esto aflige mucho a Isidora.

Después de salir de la cárcel, Isidora vive con un amante vulgar, conocido precisamente en la cárcel. El día que Isidora, libre y elegante, mantenida por su nuevo amante, llega a casa de Emilia, a reclamar a su hijo, Riquín juega con sus primos, disfrazado de gracioso obispo: "traía en la cabeza una gran mitra de papel, y echando la bendición graciosamente con su mano derecha, cantó en el latín más estropajoso que se ha oído jamás: Dominis vobiscum" (482). A pesar de ser un niño avispado, permanece ajeno a la fuerte discusión de su madre con el marido de Emilia. Durante los cinco meses que Isidora había pasado en la cárcel, los esposos Castaño habían llegado a sentir un gran cariño por Riquín y les costaba separarse de él. Sin embargo, Isidora era su madre y se lo quería llevar. Sienta a su hijo en su regazo y le da muchos besos, prometiéndole "una casulla de oro y un altar de plata" (483). Pero al niño no le interesan estas cosas. El esposo de Emilia propone que el niño escoja con quién se quiere quedar. Cuando le preguntan si quiere irse con su madre, no lo duda ni un solo instante, reacciona de esta manera: "Tan fuertemente negó con su cabezota, que se le cayó la mitra" (483). Se niega a vivir con su madre, sigue viviendo en casa de Emilia. Pero Isidora va a visitarlo muy a menudo. También lo visita la tía de Isidora, la que había apodado al niño. Ambas llevan regalos para los tres niños de la casa, pero los de Isidora son excesivos, Isidora mima mucho a su hijo: "venía dos, tres y hasta cuatro veces por semana, trayendo golosinas para *Riquín* y sus camaradas, y además velas de cera, cálices de plomo, efigies, estampas del Sagrado Corazón, mitras, estolas, y por último un monumento de Semana Santa tan completo y hermoso que no había más que pedir" (484).

Isidora no puede aguantar mucho tiempo al amante que la maltrata. Ahora sí se ve obligada a vivir en la miseria. No busca ninguna manera digna de ganarse la vida, decide prostituirse y abandona sin remordimientos a su hijo. Su prima Emilia recoge al niño para criarlo junto con los suyos propios, lo abraza y le dice: "en mí tendrás la madre que te falta. Aquella mamá tuya no existe ya, se ha ido para siempre y no volverá; se ha caído al fondo, hijo mío, al fondo... Ya lo entenderás más adelante" (502). Emilia cumplirá su promesa.

3. Conclusiones

Con Valentín en *Torquemada y San Pedro* y Riquín en *La desheredada*, Galdós crea dos magníficos e inolvidables retratos de niños. Valentín y Riquín son dos niños deformes, de cabeza demasiado grande y andares pesados, pero muy diferentes: Valentín carece

completamente de inteligencia, se comporta como un animal, mientras Riquín es muy avispado. Los juegos de Valentín son violentos, a diferencia de los juegos graciosos de Riquín.

Los dos tienen la desgracia de criarse sin padres, pero por razones distintas: la madre y el padre de Valentín se mueren, mientras los padres de Riquín siguen viviendo, pero abandonan a su hijo sin contemplaciones.

Las vidas de los dos "monstruos" se quedan truncadas en las novelas, pero se puede inferir su evolución. Valentín nunca tendrá una vida normal, nunca podrá valerse por sí mismo, necesitará siempre a los familiares y a los criados. El lector se consuela sabiendo que Torquemada no se muere sin asegurar el futuro del pequeño. En cambio, Riquín sí podrá llevar una vida normal, sobre todo si aprende de los buenos ejemplos que encuentra en la casa de su tía Emilia y será un hombre trabajador, como su tía y el esposo de ésta.

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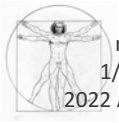

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Caliban as a Postmodern Puzzle

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Postmodernism, as conceived by literary criticism, has a particular taste for revisions, reconfigurations or reconsiderations of works belonging to a past that continues to haunt us, despite the many layers of interpretation that now mystify it. In a 2016 novel adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the much-acclaimed Canadian writer Margaret Atwood reconstructs the original plot of the play, cleverly exploiting its semantic potential for today's audiences. While preserving some of the elements and patterns in Shakespeare's text, the novelist introduces a series of displacements and changes at various levels. One of the most intriguing aspects of Atwood's novel is that it is entitled *Hag-Seed* (a derogatory term used by Prospero to address Caliban in Shakespeare's play), while there is no clearly identifiable Caliban in it. The present paper explores this puzzle, by pondering on Atwood's narrative techniques of emphasizing and developing certain discreet but unsettling meanings whose seeds are to be traced in Shakespeare's play.

Margaret Atwood's novel rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was commissioned in 2013 by Random House through its Hogarth Shakespeare Project, whose objective was to reconfigure Shakespeare's plays for modern audiences through various writers' visions. The Canadian author of the now famous *Handmaid's Tale* chose to re-imagine *The Tempest* in a novel she entitled *Hag-Seed*, launched in 2016, the year of the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Most reviews were enthusiastic, praising Atwood's ingenious and "insanely readable" text (Groskop, 2016), while its intriguing title became a sort of a puzzle for many commentators. Atwood has kept assuring her readers that there is a reason why she has chosen this title. One way to arrive at a defendable explanation in this respect is through the study of the discursive and identity construction techniques the author uses in her text.

Like many of Atwood's previous novels, *Hag-Seed* explores "the conflict between self and other" (Slettedahl Macpherson, 2010: 26) as it tells the story of the rise and fall of a theatre director, Felix Phillips. While acting as manager of the Canadian Makeshiweg acting festival, Felix is betrayed by his closest collaborator (Anthony Price). He loses his position after he has also lost his wife (due to post-birth problems) and his little daughter, Miranda (dead at the age of three, because of a childhood disease). Traumatized by his failure, he decides to retire from society completely, and lives anonymously and frugally in a shack for twelve years all by himself. His grudge against his former enemies (Tony and Sal O'Nally, now Heritage minister) does not dissolve with the passage of time, and his mourning for his lost Miranda takes a slightly schizoid form in imaginary dialogues with what he imagines to be her ghost that keeps him company at home. In the ninth year of his self-imposed exile, when this ghost menaces to break the boundaries of his sanity, he decides to open himself to the world again,

taking a job as acting instructor at the Fletcher County Correctional Institute where he stages various Shakespearean plays by using inmates as amateur actors. Going under the name of Mr. Duke (a clear allusion to Shakespeare's Duke of Milan), and helped by Estelle (the Lady of Fortune), an influential woman who ensures funds for the project and keeps his identity secret, Felix eventually gets his chance at revenge against his enemies.

Finding out that Tony and Sal are going to make a political visit to the prison where he works, he carefully devises a plan through which the staging of *The Tempest* turns into a staging of a revenge that punishes the villains and restores the balance of justice. Sal and Tony are trapped, frightened, blackmailed and forced to yield to Felix's demand that he should be reinstated as artistic director of the Makeshiweg festival. Tony will have to step down from his job and lose all his power. At the end, after having decided that he only wants to act as an *éminence grise*, Felix gives Freddie (Sal's son and the counterpart of Shakespeare's Ferdinand) the position of assistant manager and Anne-Marie (the actress playing Miranda in the prison play and who had originally been chosen for this role back in the past), that of chief choreographer. The two young people seem to have fallen in love with each other during the final staging of the play. Felix accepts Estelle's proposal of going on a cruise, but not before he has had a final revelation that prompts him to grant his imaginary Miranda her freedom:

> What has he been thinking – keeping her tethered to him all this time? Forcing her to do his bidding? How selfish he has been! Yes, he loves her: his dear one, his only child. But he knows what she truly wants, and what he owes her.
>
> 'To the elements be free', he says to her.
>
> And, finally, she is. (Atwood, 2016: 283)

The desire to be free is in fact common to most characters in this novel that develops the same themes of revenge and transformation as Shakespeare's play, whose basic structure is also preserved. In her version of what may be called an "aesthetic of confinement" (Fludernik, 2019: 628), Margaret Atwood preserves the types of relations between the Shakespearean characters, most of whom have direct counterparts: Felix/Prospero, Tony/Antonio, Sal O'Nally/Alonso, Ferdinand/Freddie, Lonnie/Gonzalo, Miranda/Anne-Marie, 8Handz/Ariel. Some of these correspondences are complicated by the presence of a third or even fourth entity: Felix is also Mr. F. Duke for the prison inmates and its employees, while Miranda is a name that designates not only Shakespeare's character, but also Felix's daughter and her ghost, to which we may add the actress Anne-Marie Greenland who plays Miranda. An even more interesting case is that of Caliban, who does not appear to have any easily identifiable counterpart in the novel, despite the fact that there are a number of narrative clues in this respect. The first tentative embodiment of the Shakespearean monster is quickly dismissed, when Felix, newly settled in his shabby cottage, decides that the family of his landlords could not possibly be cast into the significant roles from *The Tempest*:

> For a time, Felix tried to amuse himself by casting Maude as the blue-eyed hag, Sycorax the witch, and Walter as Caliban the semi-human log-hauler and dishwasher (…) None of it fitted: Bert the husband wasn't the devil, and young Crystal, a podgy, stubby child, could not be imagined as the sylph-like Miranda. (Atwood, 2016: 37)

Felix concludes that they could only be imagined as the "lesser elementals" in the play: "a source of power, though not very much of it, he joked to himself" (38). The meaning of the word 'power' is two-fold: it designates both the abstract idea of control and the concrete notion of electricity that is provided at an exaggerated price by the Maude family. It reflects the doubleness with parodic accents cultivated by Atwood throughout her novel, poised as it is between the fictional world of *The Tempest* and the real world of its postmodern heroes.

In this real world, where the prison is an everyday experience for some, Caliban is better represented in the plural. When trying to cast his inmates-actors into fitting roles, Felix identifies "various Calibans, scowling and muscular: earthy, potentially violent" (84). However, plurality does not strengthen identity, it only complicates and dilutes it. As critics have observed, Atwood makes constant use of the double voice in "depicting characters at war with themselves and their environments. Through intertextual allusions, alterations in narrative point of view, and the use of the unconscious, Atwood shows the way in which the self is constructed from contradictory impulses, some more societally acceptable than others" (Palumbo, 2000: 73). In *Hag-Seed*, the Shakespearean mariners' desperate cry at the beginning of *The Tempest* ("We split! We split! We split!") acquires a new dimension where the splitting is applied to identities that are no longer to be conceived as clearly delineated. Their fragmentation and incompleteness make them overlap with, and depend on, one another. This splitting technique necessarily applies in a novel that purports both to preserve a text from the past and to recreate it in a form that should be relevant for today's readers. As in other novels by Atwood, "duality is more than thematic (expressed in contents or subject matter) (…) Atwood is not simply rejecting duality but working with it, from it" (Grace, 1983: 4).

The doubling of the textual levels is obvious from the very first pages of the novel, which are actually written in the form of a play and which will later reappear in the text – a sort of spoiler or *in medias res* incipit meant to abruptly introduce the readers into the fictional world: "*The Tempest. By William Shakespeare. With. The Fletcher Correctional Players* / ONSCREEN*: A hand-printed sign, held up to the camera by Announcer, wearing a short purple velvet cloak. In his other hand, a quill*" (Atwood, 2016: 3). The present inserts itself within the past through references to a contemporary identifiable punitive institution, to an electronic device (the screen) and by modifications at the level of costumes, discourse and stage directions. The replies begin on the theatrical performance level, but then the actors' words blend with unidentified voices from the bewildered audience and even from outside the room: "Total darkness. Confused noise from outside the room. Yelling. Shots are fired. / A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE: What's going on? / VOICES, FROM OUTSIDE THE ROOM: Lockdown! Lockdown! / A VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE: Who's in charge here?" The scene ends with a voice from inside the room that gives the following orders: "Don't move! Quiet! Keep your heads down! Stay right where you are" (5). This injunction also functions at the discursive level: in order to understand this first dramatic scene, we need to stay captive in the narrative loop in which the main character is kept prisoner and from which he will only be able to free himself at the end of the novel.

The beginning of the first chapter confirms the two-folded/blended ontology of the elements in the text of the novel. Felix brushes his real teeth and then puts on a set of false teeth that don't fit very well. The false teeth become a metaphor for an illusion that is not effective. They might make him unable to utter his words perfectly during the ensuing performance, which would lead to the failing of the spell and to a sort of death. Thus, from the start, the illusion of theatre runs parallel to the implacable presence of material and

psychological reality and the narrative develops on the border between them. Escaping the trap of falsehood/empty illusion/trauma/fossilized past can only happen when the hero finds the adequate discourse/diction by means of which to express the development of his identities. Only then will he be able to perform the necessary actions in the process of healing and to arrive at a synthesis bringing together the lessons of the past and the requirements of the present.

This interpenetration of the two levels enables the author to create an effect of the real paradoxically enhanced through parody. I use the term parody here in the sense in which it was defined by Linda Hutcheon who argues that the manifestation of this literary species in postmodernism is of a much more complex type than what would suggest its definition in previous centuries, which brought it very close to satire and derisive laughter. Being closely linked with irony, parody is more adequately perceived by the Canadian critic as a "repetition with critical distance" (2000: 26) which signals difference "at the very heart of similarity". It may have many "pragmatic positions" (34) ranging from reverence to mockery and it encodes both change and cultural continuity, being a mode of the "ex-centric" (35) that is marginalized by a dominant ideology.

In Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, this game between identification and distance is often illustrated by the ways in which the characters position themselves in relation to Shakespeare's text. Shakespeare's play acquires new life thereby: not only does it serve as a structure through which the world of the present is criticized, but it also becomes more credible when its actions, gestures and characters are mirrored, however obliquely, in the actions, gestures and characters of the present. When at the height of his career, the protagonist is obsessed with *The Tempest*, which he wants to stage in a memorable and shocking adaptation secretly meant to bring his dead Miranda back to life. Sharing with Prospero a powerful thirst for revenge, he filters his perceptions and interpretations through the patterns of Shakespeare's play, entertaining his illusions about the power of theatre. He eventually loses his pretentious grandiosity when he comes to understand that he has condescendingly assumed a superior position in a creative process that should in fact be communal: "It's not my play", says Felix after he watches the impressive Caliban chant devised by Leggs together with Anne-Marie. The latter laughs at him openly: "Poor old Felix! Are we crapping up your play?" (Atwood, 2016: 176). This might as well be read as a question addressed by the irreverent present to the canonical past, by the present artists to the old bard who might answer just like Atwood's hero: 'It's our play'. Yet Shakespeare's answer would be much more vigorous than that of Felix, who tormented as he is by postmodernist contradictions and hesitations: "Does he believe it? Yes. No. Not really. Yes" (Atwood, 2016: 176).

This sort of realization is one of the moments that indicate his transformation from an artist with an inflated unsympathetic ego into a man who understands his past errors and is then able to perform redeeming cathartic actions. His capacity for self-criticism and self-parody renders him capable of opening the doors of his self-imposed exile. When he chooses to live with Miranda's ghost in the shack from where he spies on his enemies, he is aware of his own delusion: "Call it a conceit, a whimsy, a piece of acting: he didn't really believe it, but he engaged in this non-reality as if it were real (…) Was there a small girl listening to him? No, not really. But it was soothing to think that there was" (45). He continues to half-believe in this wistful daydreaming until, one day, he hears her voice outside the window:It wasn't one of his whimsical yet despairing fabrications. He actually heard a voice. It was not a consolation.

Instead, it frightened him. 'This has gone way too far,' he told himself sternly. 'Snap out of it, Felix. Pull yourself together. Break out of your cell. You need a real-world connection' (47).

Parody is also manifest in the textual reconstructions of the Shakespearean play such as Caliban's chant, or the reframing of the second scene of Act 2 by Team Antonio. The adaptation of the original text idiosyncratically blends words, structures and paradigms of the present into what appears to the inmates as a long and boring original scene. Recast as "Evil Bro Antonio", the scene is given a rap rhythm that helps SnakeEye in his declamation:

> I'm the man, I'm the Duke, I'm the Duke of Milan, You want to get pay, gotta do what I say. Wasn't always this way, no, no, I was once this dude called Antonio/ I was no big deal and it made me feel so bad, so mad, / Got under my skin, 'cause I couldn't ever win, / Got no respect, I was second in line, / But I just kept smilin', just kept lyin', said everything's fine. (156)

It is not only the style that is adapted, localized, but also the perspective. In Shakespeare's text it is Prospero who tells the story, but the inmates in Atwood's novel achieve more verisimilitude by appointing Antonio as narrator. The distance between the two texts is increased by the discursive additions of the inmates who offer explanations and make judgments on what happened to Prospero who "was a fool, not cool, he didn't look, Didn't look around, take care of his stuff, Didn't watch his back, stuck his head in a book" (Atwood, 2016: 157).

The parodic procedures involved in the construction of identities in Atwood's novel emphasize how the postmodernist episteme governs the diegetic universe. This aspect is mostly involved in the manner in which Caliban is reconfigured in the text. We have already mentioned that he does not have a clear counterpart in Atwood's novel, which is nevertheless surprisingly entitled after him, despite the fact that the main hero is in fact a Prospero. Hidden behind her protagonist's point of view, the narrative voice apparently vacillates when trying to pinpoint a Caliban in the plot. Quickly dismissing the first identification between Caliban and his landlords' son, Felix then moves on to the plural as he refers to the group of inmates he teaches as 'Calibans'. The problem is that neither of them can be seen as a definite Caliban, even though they manifest various traits of the original Shakespearean character.

I believe that the narrator's subtle suggestion is that Caliban may in fact be conceived as a shared mode of being, as a series of identity traits/ingredients unevenly distributed among a series of distinct characters. This is not at all contradictory to Shakespeare's Caliban, whose ontology is notoriously ambiguous. When he first notices Caliban, Trinculo hesitates in his description of the strange creature:

> What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not of the newest Poor-John. A strange fish! (…) Legged like a man and his fins like arms! Warm o' my troth! I do now let loose my opinion; hold it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. (2.1.24-27;33-36)

What Trinculo's perception underlines here is Caliban's most important ontological characteristic: his hybridity. In Shakespeare's play, this hybridity is rooted in the union between a mortal (Sycorax) and a supernatural being (the devil). Yet this explanation can hardly be

accepted in a postmodernist novel like Atwood's, concerned as it is with lifelikeness and relevance for today's world. Atwood is innovative when she turns this hybridity into an identity building technique that affects all of her characters. Instead of gathering all of Caliban's contradictory traits in one identifiable character, the novelist variously bestows his traits on the other characters, whose contradictions and incongruence are thus increased. One may even say that they become more real(istic) in this way. Thus, Caliban's social inferiority and performance of humble tasks are seen not only in Walter, the log-hauler and dish-washer son of Felix's landlords, but also in the inmates. Unsurprisingly, the latter variously share Caliban's sexual appetite, resentment, unruly masculinity, earthiness, violence and foul language. What is more unexpected is that Anne-Marie, the young actress playing Miranda, is also characterized by a menacing physical strength and ability to fight, by a foul mouth and by a certain kind of malignity. Furthermore, Caliban's monstrosity is openly associated in the inmates' acting with the political figures in their audience: "You been callin' me a monster./But who's more monstrous than you?/You stole, you cheated, you bribed, you lied,/You didn't care who you kicked aside" (Atwood, 2016: 230).

Yet the most conspicuous identity penetration by Caliban at the level of the narrative may be studied in the figure of the protagonist. Despite his position as a usurped Prospero/theatre director who lives in vengeful seclusion and manages to punish his enemies in the end, Felix sometimes appears subtly encoded as a Caliban at the level of the discourse. This overlapping begins in the first chapter, when Felix looks in the mirror and, while exercising his diction through sounds that remind us of Caliban's declared inability to use language other than for cursing, he perceives his grin as "the grin of a cornered chimpanzee, part anger, part threat, part dejection" (10). He is now tormenting himself by imagining how his enemy is enjoying the benefits of his crimes, rather as Caliban resentfully refers to Prospero as a colonizing unjust master in Shakespeare's play. Later on, Felix is increasingly affected by the natural noises around him in a manner that clearly alludes to Caliban's intensely poetic "The isle is full of noises" monologue: "The silence began to get to him. Not silence, exactly. The bird songs, the chirping of the crickets, the wind in the trees. The flies, buzzing so contrapuntally in his outhouse. Melodious. Soothing" (40).

The more profound identification or resemblance between Caliban and Prospero is unequivocally stated in one of the metatextual chapters from the last section of the novel, *Team Caliban*, where the inmates describe what they imagine to be possible futures for the "thing of darkness" Prospero chooses to take with him when he leaves the island. One of the inmate actors declares that his team has come to the conclusion that Prospero and Caliban were father and son, and their connection is bound to make Prospero understand "that the bad in Caliban is pretty much the same as the bad in him, Prospero. They're both angry, both name-callers, both full of revenge: they're joined at the hip. Caliban is like his bad other self. Like father, like son" (267). Thus, Caliban figures as a catalyst in Prospero's transformation from a vengeful man into a forgiving human being who sees himself in a more appropriately modest light. In Atwood's text, this catalyst role is given prominence, as the Calibans of the plot unawaringly help and even force Felix to understand his predicament and develop into a mature man able to get out of his several prisons.

On the figurative level, Caliban functions as a semantic trait knit in the symbol of the cloak Felix had designed for his original representation of *The Tempest*, a cloak made of the furs of various stuffed toy animals, whose beady eyes begin to brighten as Felix achieves self-knowledge and is ready to play in his last performance. The cloak serves in fact as a sort of

intermediary between his former darker vengeful and infatuated self and his final liberated self. Costumes throughout the novel are indeed associated with the idea of self-mirroring and self-development. The inmates-actors learn to love themselves as they watch "the many faces watching their own faces as they pretended to be someone else" (Atwood, 2016: 58). After all, assuming a role is like becoming a clean slate on which you can draw "a new face". "If you're nobody, you can't be somebody unless you're somebody else" (61), Felix teaches his "elves"/inmate actors. This process of becoming affects Atwood's postmodern Caliban, too. When he is played by the inmates (most of whom want to impersonate him, since they all "get him"), he is freed from the cage not only of his former language, but also of his former text.

Being asked to imagine possible futures for him, the inmates come up with three alternative life-scripts – something they don't do for the other characters. Their phantasmic identification with Caliban releases their own creativity and reminds us that Caliban is not only a brutish beast, but also, and most significantly, a very sensitive poetic being. The hag-seed in him that gives the title of the novel and that is an insult addressed to him by Prospero is also the seed of growth, of metamorphosis, of creation. His ambiguity is the ambiguity of life that makes everything possible even while everything must remain messy, hybrid, incompletely defined. The creativity that is associated with him is therefore superior to Prospero's/Felix's magic, as it is able to survive on its own in the real world where he might become a music star provided he stays away from temptations like alcohol and drugs. Watching Leggs present the future possible trajectories of Caliban's existence, Felix becomes aware that the occasional actor has gone beyond the simple playing previously planned: "He pauses. Is it a studied pause or is he chocking up? I've taught him too well, thinks Felix, if even I can't tell the difference" (264).

Yet the imagination of the inmates from Team Caliban does not stop here: it becomes unpredictable, just like the magic Felix has taught them. After the acting course finishes, they are planning a musical about Caliban who they think deserves to have a "play to himself" (270). Their parody draws on the same themes of oppression, rebellion, revenge, resentment and freedom. At this moment, Felix understands that "Caliban has escaped the play. He's escaped from Prospero, like a shadow detaching itself from its body and skulking off on its own. Now there's no one to restrain him. Will Prospero be spared, or will retribution climb in through his window one dark night and cut his weasand? Felix wonders. Gingerly, he feels his neck" (Atwood, 2016: 272).

Shakespeare's play ends with Prospero asking the audience to set him free. He thus crosses the border between the two ontological realms and leaves the audience baffled: why is he asking to be set free when he is in fact already free and rehabilitated? The answer may be that the thing of darkness (his obsession, vengefulness, misery) he accepts as his own still keeps him a prisoner. After all, what may follow after the play ends is going to be marked by the same human fallibility that has been manifested before. People are still going to oppress others, dispossess them, punish them or take revenge on them, as the inmates know only too well. But Margaret Atwood finds an original way of freeing her Prospero from his multiple prisons: her elusive Caliban, the imaginary being they all "get", escapes Prospero's world and finds a destiny of his own, by acting on his own will. He is the perpetual and unruly seed of creativity, as intractable, fluid and contradictory as life itself. He best exemplifies Atwood's integration of

> the moral and aesthetic dimensions within the context of that narrative self-consciousness that, while directing the reader's attention to the fictive nature of the world

> of the novel, will nevertheless not allow him to evade its moral implications. The reader of Atwood's novels can never be passive; he must accept responsibility for the world he is bringing to life by his act of reading. (Hutcheon, 1983: 29-30)

Finally, the title of the novel is not only an allusion to Caliban's resistance to definition, but also a challenge addressed to its readers through an ironical and subtle curse. We have to acknowledge him ours.

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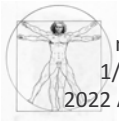

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Le désir monstrueux dans l'œuvre dramatique de Marie NDiaye

The Monstrous Desire in Marie Ndiaye's Dramatic Work

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Mots-clés

théâtre ; réalisme magique ; psychiatrie ; Marie NDiaye ; monstre ; personnage dramatique.

L'œuvre de Marie NDiaye est parfois décrite comme relevant du « réalisme magique », un réalisme dont un élément ne trouve pas sa place dans cet univers proche du quotidien et cela de façon inexplicable, ce qui fait surgir la magie. Dans ses textes dramatiques (et tout particulièrement *Hilda*, *Les Grandes Personnes* et *Toute vérité*, ce dernier écrit en collaboration avec son époux, Jean-Yves Cendrey), l'élément « magique » se retrouve dans les désirs des personnages. Leurs désirs sont considérés comme anormaux (perversion sexuelle, perversion narcissique) et ces désirs hors normes transforment les personnages en monstres, même si le monstre n'est pas toujours celui que l'on croit dans un univers où magie et raison se confondent.

L'exploration de ce phénomène de déviance se rapproche aussi de certains tableaux cliniques concernant les troubles du comportement, comme la personnalité-limite, amenant l'œuvre de Marie NDiaye à une frontière trouble entre la magie et la psychiatrie, où chaque lecteur/spectateur peut voir un monstre selon ses propres désirs.

Keywords

theatre; magical realism; psychiatry; Marie NDiaye; monster; dramatic character.

Marie NDiaye's literary work is at times considered as an example of magical realism, a kind of realism whereby one of the structural elements does not quite fit within an otherwise true-to-life world, which therefore unexpectedly triggers the magical. In NDiaye's dramatic works (in particular *Hilda*, *Les Grandes Personnes* and *Toute vérité*, the last one written in collaboration with Jean-Yves Cendrey, her husband), this "magical" element transpires in the characters' desires. These "abnormal" (sexual perversion, narcissistic perversion) and out of the ordinary desires turn characters into monsters, even though, in a world where magic and reason are conflated, monsters are not necessarily defined in the traditional way.

In addition, the exploration of devious phenomena leads to quasi clinical descriptions of behavioural disorders, such as BPD (borderline personality disorder), which takes Marie NDiaye's works to a blurred border where magic and psychiatry can happily coexist, and where each reader/spectator can see a monster according to his/her own desires.

L'œuvre dramatique de Marie NDiaye s'apparente parfois aux exhibitions de monstres de foire, à la nuance près que ces monstres-là ont un visage humain. Leur monstruosité n'est pas immédiatement perceptible car nous ne nous trouvons plus face à des créatures relevant de la tératologie comme autrefois ceux présentés dans les baraques foraines, où ils étaient aisément repérables grâce à une ou plusieurs malformations physiques. Ils faisaient partie de cette catégorie de monstres que Matthieu Duperrex et François Dutrait appellent le « monstre organique » (2011 : 21).

Aujourd'hui, le monstre est plus discret puisqu'il n'est repérable qu'à travers ses actes. La déviance s'établit par rapport aux bonnes mœurs et à la raison : Duperrex et Dutrait emploient l'expression « monstre moral » pour désigner ces individus (2011 : 21) et non plus par rapport aux difformités du corps. Cette monstruosité-là est plus discrète puisqu'elle s'exprime à travers le discours des personnages qui s'exhibent eux-mêmes quand ils racontent, sur une scène de théâtre, leurs actes qui relèvent ouvertement, pour certains, de la nosographie des « troubles du comportement ». Ces personnages frôlent la pathologie psychiatrique et Marie NDiaye excelle dans l'exhibition des « monstres moraux ». Mme Lemarchand dans *Hilda* a beau annoncer : « Je suis un être humain, sensible » (NDiaye, 1999 : 34), ses actes nous prouvent le contraire : son obsession pour Hilda et son apparence physique, son désir de s'approprier sa « force intérieure inaltérable […] un noyau indestructible » (NDiaye ; Crom, 2009).

Cet « autre », objet de tous les fantasmes immoraux, est un leitmotiv dans le théâtre de Marie NDiaye, comme nous le verrons avec Mme Lemarchand, le professeur des écoles pédophile des *Grandes Personnes*, ou le père alcoolique et violent, habitué aux séjours en hôpital psychiatrique de *Toute vérité*, pièce que NDiaye a écrite en collaboration avec son mari, Jean-Yves Cendrey. Marie NDiaye exhibe, en jouant avec les potentialités scéniques, des figures monstrueuses. Sa dramaturgie permet une exploration de la psyché humaine dans ses aspects les plus sombres et nous offre une vision terrifiante du monstre moderne. Notre auteur dramatique a reconnu que ses personnages étaient « soit faibles, soit forts mais au sens monstrueux du terme, au sens destructeur » (NDiaye ; Crom, 2009).

Hilda est le premier texte dramatique de Marie NDiaye. La pièce met en scène la façon dont Mme Lemarchand, après avoir tout mis en œuvre pour qu'Hilda Meyer devienne sa nouvelle femme de service, la vide littéralement de son essence jusqu'à la transformer en une coquille sans chair. Nous ne pouvons que penser à la figure du vampire, à la seule différence que le vampire suce le sang de ses victimes, alors que l'employeuse d'Hilda semble aspirer son âme jusqu'à sa disparition psychique. Le portrait d'Hilda que fait Mme Lemarchand, à ce stade de sa transformation, est tout simplement terrifiant :

> Hilda ne fait plus grand-chose, elle n'adresse même plus la parole à mes enfants et le regard d'Hilda, Franck, est vide, perdu. Hilda est passive et lente. Elle n'est plus froide ni distante, elle n'est plus rien, elle n'est plus que soumise et apathique, et pas efficace du tout. Je ne sais que faire d'Hilda, Franck. Toute vitalité l'a quittée. Hilda est égarée, molle, et je vous avais dit, Franck, rappelez-vous, je vous avais dit il y a trois mois qu'Hilda n'était pas morte. Eh bien, Hilda est morte à présent, Franck, morte, morte. Il n'y plus d'Hilda. (NDiaye, 1999 : 88)

Mme Lemarchand ne désire plus que rendre Hilda à son mari Franck, comme on rend en magasin un article défectueux, pour la remplacer par une nouvelle victime. Elle jette alors son

dévolu sur Corinne, la sœur d'Hilda, mais celle-ci anéantit vite ses espoirs en refusant tout net de devenir sa nouvelle proie, car elle sait déjà ce qui l'attend si elle accepte de travailler chez Mme Lemarchand. C'est un processus sans fin car, au moment où le « monstre » a incorporé toute la vitalité d'une femme, celle-ci devient sans intérêt ; il lui faut trouver quelqu'un d'autre, qui sera à son tour remplacé par une nouvelle femme de peine, à la suite de Monique, Françoise, Consuelo, Yvette, Brigitte… Le lecteur/spectateur assiste, impuissant, à la répétition d'un processus qui a déjà fait plusieurs victimes.

Ce processus d'objetisation de l'être humain dans lequel est entrée Mme Lemarchand est si clairement exposé par Marie NDiaye qu'il en devient presque clinique et relève clairement de la perversion, selon Michel Guérin. Le monstre ne peut pas avoir pitié pour l'autre, tout absorbé qu'il est à vouloir obtenir cet objet à tout prix pour ensuite procéder à son anéantissement.

> L'autre est moins méprisé comme autre qu'absorbé – incorporé – comme mien. Il n'existe même pas pour mon désir ; il apparaît pour disparaître *dans* la tension appétive. […] Encore une fois, l'autre n'est pas seulement maltraité, déconsidéré ; il n'existe simplement pas, puisqu'il tombe, comme dans un gouffre, au fond de l'être-là-*déjà*. L'obscénité chavire d'emblée la scène. Tous les regards lourds dénotent une sexualité infantile-perverse. (Guérin, 2000 : 294)

Nous avons là une première étape vers le diagnostic de la monstruosité de Mme Lemarchand : cet engouement soudain serait de l'ordre de la perversion. Ce désir est tellement exacerbé qu'il devient l'élément perturbateur de cet univers très banal de petite ville de province : c'est en cela qu'apparaît la magie. L'insistance du personnage, vouloir à tout prix Hilda, semble suspecte dès le début du texte et nous supposons rapidement que cette véritable obsession n'est pas saine.

> Mme LEMARCHAND. – […] Aucune femme n'a jamais refusé de travailler pour nous. Cela ne se produira pas. Nous sommes des gens cultivés, monsieur Meyer, et profondément sensibles à la détresse humaine. Aussi je veux Hilda.
>
> FRANCK. – Nous ne sommes pas dans la détresse.
>
> Mme LEMARCHAND. – Je le sais bien, je le sais bien. C'est une façon de parler. […] Qu'Hilda sache bien qu'elle compte déjà beaucoup pour moi et que je la veux absolument. (NDiaye, 1999 : 8)

Mme Lemarchand a le pouvoir sur la famille Meyer puisqu'elle est l'employeuse, mais elle qualifie d'« amitié », à plusieurs reprises, les liens qu'elle tente de créer avec Hilda. L'amitié est dangereuse dans l'œuvre de Marie NDiaye, idée que nous retrouvons dans une autre de ses pièces, intitulée *Rien d'humain* (2004). Ce mot, « amitié », cherche souvent à qualifier la dominance de l'un sur l'autre. Dominique Rabaté, dans son résumé d'*Hilda*, va plus loin pour qualifier cette relation employeur-employée : « Madame Lemarchand avoue son inaptitude à aimer ses enfants, son ennui à vivre auprès de son mari : elle n'est qu'apparence sociale, et, paradoxalement, seul son désir d'emprise hystérique sur Hilda lui confère quelque (monstrueuse) humanité » (2008 : 30-31). Le choix de Dominique Rabaté dans les mots utilisés est révélateur puisqu'il fait de Mme Lemarchand un monstre du désir à visage humain et c'est précisément dans ce désir que se loge la perversion du personnage. Hilda n'est pas une

personne aux yeux de Mme Lemarchand, mais un objet qu'elle désire et achète : « dans le théâtre de Marie NDiaye, l'autre n'est plus qu'un pion sur l'échiquier ; son objet doit être approprié, incorporé envers et contre tous » (Meurée, 2009 : 122). Mme Lemarchand souffre alors d'une perversion qui la pousse à tout mettre en œuvre pour atteindre son objet et, une fois en possession de celui-ci, elle s'apprête à détruire son identité par la manipulation et le chantage. Il s'agit là de la perversion narcissique telle que l'a décrite le psychanalyste Paul-Claude Racamier dans son article intitulé « Entre agonie psychique, déni psychotique et perversion narcissique », paru en 1986. Il qualifie ce trouble du comportement ainsi : « une propension active du sujet à nourrir son propre narcissisme au détriment de celui d'autrui, ce n'est donc pas une perversion sexuelle » (1986 : 1307). L'homosexualité latente, qui pourrait apparaître comme une interprétation possible du texte, est alors à écarter.

Ce qui rend la pièce franchement troublante, par-delà le côté psychopathologique du personnage, c'est avec quel art Marie NDiaye nous contamine, nous, les lecteurs/spectateurs : elle nous jette un sort à travers la répétition du mot « Hilda ». Bien que la pièce s'intitule *Hilda*, nous n'entendrons jamais le personnage éponyme prononcer un mot. Nous ne le verrons même jamais sur scène, contrairement à ce que laisse entendre le titre de la pièce. Si Mme Lemarchand est un monstre qui se nourrit d'Hilda, de sa « force intérieure inaltérable […] un noyau indestructible » (NDiaye ; Crom, 2009), nous sommes à notre tour contaminés par cette frénésie. « Hilda est partout, obsédante et évanescente, sans avoir plus rien de tangible, rien de réel, comme un mirage ou un morceau de cire qui ne serait fait que de la valeur que les autres veulent bien lui attribuer, valeur monétaire et amoureuse indistinctement » (Rabaté, 2008 : 30). Le prénom sans cesse répété fonctionne comme un leitmotiv qui fait grandir l'envie chez le lecteur/spectateur de voir enfin Hilda, jusqu'à atteindre provoquer chez lui un sentiment proche de celui que décrit Mme Lemarchand au début de la pièce : « Je ne supporte plus de ne pas connaître Hilda, Franck, son visage, sa taille. Je suis l'esclave de ce prénom et de ces femmes en général » (NDiaye, 1999 : 10). Attente sans fin ni satisfaction, comme les figures de *En attendant Godot* de Samuel Beckett : toute la pièce est basée sur une attente jamais satisfaite. Marie NDiaye a exhibé un monstre sous nos yeux et elle nous a envoûtés jusqu'à nous transformer en monstres désirants.

Mme Lemarchand n'est pas le seul monstre du désir à hanter la scène dans le théâtre de Marie NDiaye. Le personnage du Maître dans la pièce *Les Grandes Personnes* est lui aussi un monstre du désir. Il n'a pas de nom et il est uniquement désigné par sa fonction. Il s'agit d'un professeur des écoles pédophile, une déviance que l'Organisation mondiale de la santé classe dans les « troubles de la préférence sexuelle ». Ce personnage est d'autant plus frappant qu'il est inspiré d'un fait divers vécu par le couple NDiaye-Cendrey. Un professeur des écoles, connu pour avoir fait subir des attouchements à ses élèves, était protégé par sa hiérarchie et les parents. Jean-Yves Cendrey s'est alors rendu dans l'établissement pour livrer l'enseignant à la police. Le romancier écrira, lui aussi, sur cet événement, un texte intitulé *Les Jouets vivants*, où il relate leur impossibilité à rester passifs :

> Nuit. C'était la nuit. Une nuit blanche à faire peur. Marie et lui rendus fous, incapables de se taire une seconde, incapables de ne pas se répéter cent fois, incapables de supporter que les choses suivissent longtemps encore leur cours paresseux. Ils ne pourraient pas, dans quelques heures, laisser tous ces parents

> livrer à l'Enseignant son quotidien de chair fraîche. Mais quel moyen employer pour ce faire ? [...]
>
> Marie lui dit : "Tu dois aller le chercher."
>
> C'était très simple, trop simple, trop court, ça venait de naître de la rage et de la détresse, et c'était cependant prodigieux d'évidence.
>
> Plus d'une heure durant il arpenta le petit jardin, élaborant le scénario de la neutralisation de l'Enseignant. (Cendrey, 2007 : 141)

Le romancier rapporte aussi comment, durant son procès, cet homme de cinquante et un ans a été qualifié par un psychologue d'individu pervers (Cendrey, 2007 : 223).

Pour apporter une première tentative d'explication à cette perversion, nous nous référons aux travaux de Sigmund Freud. Dans ses essais sur la sexualité, il a réparti les perversions en deux catégories : « Les perversions sont soit *a)* des *transgressions* anatomiques des zones corporelles destinés à l'union sexuelle, soit *b)* des *arrêts* aux relations intermédiaires avec l'objet sexuel qui, normalement, doivent être rapidement traversées sur la voie du but sexuel final » (Freud, 1987 : 57-58). Là encore, le personnage-monstre créé par Marie NDiaye touche à la description clinique puisque l'on voit clairement que la perversion du Maître appartient à la seconde catégorie : il n'a pas atteint le « but sexuel final », à savoir une sexualité dont l'objet serait l'adulte. Pour l'acteur (qui est « une grande personne »), l'équilibre du rôle est particulièrement délicat.

Un autre aspect du personnage du Maître intensifie sa qualité de monstre ; bien qu'il soit conscient de sa perversion, il recherche volontairement la compagnie de victimes potentielles sans se préoccuper des conséquences de ses actes. Cela est aussi une caractéristique des pervers : « Les pédophiles appartiennent à toutes les classes de la société, du diplomate au manutentionnaire, mais, le plus fréquemment, ils exercent un métier en lien avec les enfants… » (Freud, 1987 : 45). Le nom du personnage, le « Maître », est une mise en valeur de la perversion du personnage puisqu'il a sciemment choisi une situation où il lui était plus facile, de par sa fonction, de donner libre cours à sa perversion. Toutefois, l'univers dramaturgique de Marie NDiaye ne se divise pas en deux catégories qui seraient les « monstres » d'un côté et les « gens normaux » de l'autre. Il y a un monstre exposé (Mme Lemarchand ou le Maître), mais aussi ceux qui se cachent, plus discrets : dans *Les Grandes Personnes*, les parents d'élèves ont tacitement choisi de se taire, à l'exception d'une certaine madame B. Ainsi, ils s'écartent du rôle traditionnel de protecteur dévolu aux parents, car ils refusent d'agir pour éloigner le pédophile de leurs enfants. Ce qui peut paraître scandaleux dans une situation où tout un chacun peut se projeter, devient alors, par son côté incroyable, magique. Ces parents vont même jusqu'à accepter une sorte de marché tacite avec l'enseignant :

> Il suffisait, pour l'admettre, de ne poser aucun mot là-dessus
>
> Oui, oui, c'était peut-être là notre façon de voir les choses – en échange de la perfection de son enseignement et de la remarquable direction de notre école, le maître avait notre autorisation tacite pour jouer avec nos enfants comme il lui plaisait. (NDiaye, 2011 : 37)

La mise en scène de la pièce par Christophe Perton joue sur ces deux univers qui ne devraient pas se rencontrer : la sexualité et l'école. Les spectateurs ont pu voir le Maître baisser son pantalon et s'asseoir sur un pupitre, soit un élément totalement inattendu dans une salle de

classe. Ce geste, qui ne devrait pas exister dans une école, fait basculer la scène dans un univers fantasmagorique, dimension que l'on retrouve plus généralement dans tous les textes de Marie NDiaye, romanesques ou dramatiques. Cet effet relève du « réalisme magique », l'irruption d'une étrangeté dans un univers proche du quotidien. C'est précisément cela qui a interpellé le metteur en scène : « Il y a une dimension fantastique et une part de mystère dans son écriture qui me touchent profondément… » (Perton ; Berforini : s. d.).

La famille, chez Marie NDiaye, n'est pas faite pour rassurer. Dans la pièce *Les Grandes Personnes*, les parents sont monstrueux et destructeurs. Le couple d'amis des parents du Maître ont fait fuir leurs enfants ; ils continuent toutefois à hanter les lieux, fantômes du passé ou expression de la culpabilité du couple. Les parents d'élèves protègent le secret du côté obscur du Maître au détriment de leur progéniture. L'enseignant, si monstrueux soit-il, est, à son tour, la création de ses parents, Georges et Isabelle, qui, à l'image des parents d'élèves, sont loin d'être exemplaires. Obsédés par leur désir d'avoir un fils idéal, ils l'ont enfermé dans un état de l'entre-deux, où il n'est pas tout à fait un adulte, mais plutôt un enfant. Si l'on en croit Freud sur l'origine des perversions, c'est dans ce décalage que réside l'origine de la monstruosité du Maître :

> Tout se passe dès le développement de la sexualité infantile ; ce développement suppose au terme du processus une issue favorable de la situation œdipienne, de sorte que le sujet se détache de l'auto-érotisme en subordonnant les zones érogènes à la génitalité. La sexualité adulte apparaît comme l'issue heureuse d'un engrenage de conflits qui auraient pu tourner autrement. (Bouvry, s. d. : 1)

Le sujet n'est pas capable de vivre une sexualité avec des partenaires de son âge car il est resté, sous bien des aspects, un enfant lui-même. Le Maître n'a pas atteint cette « issue heureuse ». Si ses parents ne lui ont pas permis de dépasser le stade œdipien, nous pouvons en conclure que cet amour excessif pour leur fils peut être qualifié d'incestueux, bien qu'il soit platonique. Malgré son âge, il cherchera toute sa vie le contact des enfants, de ceux qu'il voit comme étant ses semblables. Il pense comme eux, se conduit comme eux. Cela est frappant dans l'extrait qui suit :

> ISABELLE : […] Viens, mon petit, on y va maintenant.
>
> LE MAÎTRE : Ces interminables conversations de grandes personnes, ça me fatigue.
>
> ÉVA : Ils ont de la chance de t'avoir, tu es un bon fils. (NDiaye, 2011 : 18)

Par ailleurs, comme les enfants, il appelle les autres adultes « les grandes personnes ». C'est un ensemble d'êtres humains dont lui-même ne fait pas partie et il le sait. Quand le Maître cherche désespérément à confier à ses parents son monstrueux secret, ceux-ci ne peuvent pas ou ne veulent pas l'entendre. Ils sont incapables d'envisager que leur fils idéal soit un monstre. Son physique pâle est, à leurs yeux, le signe d'une pureté absolue.

Si la pédophilie est considérée comme l'une des pires perversions possibles, nous pouvons néanmoins nous interroger sur sa pertinence au théâtre. Elle a toute sa place sur une scène si l'on considère que « la représentation des interdits majeurs met à distance ce que les désirs humains ont de trop contraignant ; la formidable censure sociale est levée par le spectacle de toutes les transgressions » (Ubersfeld, 1996 : 282). Ce qui empêche *Les Grandes*

Personnes de tomber dans la dénonciation morale facile réside dans le fait que le Maître est, lui aussi, une victime, victime de ses propres parents et qu'il ne peut pas sortir de cette perversion. Il ne peut vivre avec cet héritage trop lourd à porter. Alors, le Maître finit par s'envoler, se transformer en une créature mi-homme mi-oiseau, ultime tentative pour s'éloigner de ses parents.

La pièce *Toute vérité* est bien différente d'*Hilda* ou des *Grandes Personnes*. Elle a paru dans un recueil intitulé *Puzzle*, qui est issu d'une collaboration entre Marie NDiaye et son mari Jean-Yves Cendrey. *Toute vérité* est un texte dramatique écrit à quatre mains, qui met en scène le dialogue d'un père avec son fils. Jean-Yves Cendrey a écrit le discours quasi autobiographique du fils alors que Marie NDiaye a rédigé la parole de cet adjudant-chef monstrueux, ce beau-père qu'elle n'a pas connu (Gonce ; Notte : s.d.). Plus exactement, il ne faudrait pas parler de dialogues entre les personnages, il serait plus juste d'évoquer un règlement de comptes puisque le texte repose sur les reproches que le fils (projection de Jean-Yves Cendrey) adresse à son père. La rancune dont témoigne le fils nous paraît très vite justifiée, car son père n'a pas été un modèle : manifestement violent et alcoolique, il a fait de fréquents séjours en hôpital psychiatrique.

> FILS : Rares et bien parcellaires sont mes souvenirs d'enfance.
>
> PÈRE : Et moi donc – ma pauvre enfance !
>
> FILS : Une chance, tant il est vrai que ta bêtise, ta perversité, tes poings et ta brioche d'adjudant-chef d'intendance jettent sur ces bribes un froid dégoûtant […] Adolescent, je t'ai fui, fui *"pour chercher refuge dans ma chambre, auprès de mes livres"* […] toi qui, paraît-il, conseilla les miens (les miens que tu n'es jamais parvenu à lire), conseilla les miens aux copensionnaires de ton hôpital psychiatrique favori, lors du dernier séjour que tu y fis. (NDiaye ; Cendrey, 2007 : 75-76)

Nous avons vu deux monstres pervers précédemment, l'un narcissique et l'autre sexuel. Avec ce nouveau texte, nous aborderons une autre psychopathologie, le trouble de la personnalité *borderline*, aussi appelé en français « état-limite » ou « personnalité limite ». Le *Bulletin de psychiatrie* entièrement consacré à ce trouble du comportement souligne les difficultés de définition de cet état, mais nous trouvons chez le personnage du père un grand nombre de symptômes évoqués, par exemple : « agressivité : colères, hostilités, violence, de l'impulsivité » (Fineltain, 1996). Un ensemble d'émotions et d'attitudes que la mise en scène et l'acteur devront s'appliquer à rendre sur scène pour donner toute leur profondeur aux personnages. Le fils se construit en miroir vis-à-vis de son père. Ceci, bien évidemment, donne des éléments de mise en scène particulièrement intéressants, puisqu'ils suggèrent un travail sur la ressemblance/dissemblance qui peut exister dans le jeu des acteurs, mais aussi dans la scénographie.

Quand Joel Paris décrit dans l'*American Psychiatric Press* la « personnalité-limite », il cite plusieurs symptômes que nous retrouvons chez le personnage du père : « Les relations avec autrui sont souvent intenses mais orageuses et instables avec des difficultés de maintenir des liens intimes étroits. […] Il y a aussi une instabilité émotionnelle avec de sensibles et fréquents signes d'une dépression […] abus de drogues ou d'alcool » (Fineltain, 1996). C'est précisément ce type de comportement que le fils reproche à son père : la famille n'est pas censée être un entourage gangrené par l'agressivité inexpliquée, les allers-retours en institution ou l'alcool.

L'argumentaire du fils repose sur son désir de normalité (mais qu'est-ce que la normalité ? Est-ce un nouveau désir monstrueux ?) : son père n'a pas été une figure paternelle modèle et cela a eu des conséquences pour toute la famille.

Bien que ces reproches proviennent du fils, personnage inspiré par Jean-Yves Cendrey, on peut trouver ces exigences de normalité ailleurs dans l'œuvre de Marie NDiaye, dans le roman bien nommé *En famille* par exemple, où Fanny doit subir les critiques car elle est un monstre aux yeux de sa famille :

> Tes cousins agissent en sorte que la famille perdure conformément à quelques règles simples, prouvant ainsi bien mieux que toi leur respect pour cette institution sacrée. […] Est-ce ainsi qu'il faut vénérer la famille ? Mais elle n'a jamais attendu de toi que des comportements ordinaires ! (Richard, 1996 : 169)

Cela peut parfaitement être adapté au personnage du père de *Toute vérité* : par son comportement, lui non plus ne vénère pas cette institution sacrée qu'est la famille. Toutefois, comme toujours chez Marie NDiaye, le monstre n'est pas aussi primaire qu'il y paraît, il a une certaine profondeur. Quand il évoque son enfance, l'adjudant-chef parle de sa mère, alcoolique, qui s'est suicidée, le laissant seul avec un père lui aussi alcoolique. Il est alors devenu un monstre moral à l'image de ceux qui l'ont engendré. Tout comme le Maître des *Grandes Personnes*, sa monstruosité ne réside pas dans l'inné mais dans l'acquis.

Le motif de la famille anormale ou déviante est récurrent dans l'œuvre de Marie NDiaye, que ce soit dans ses romans ou ses pièces : « les relations familiales que l'auteur choisit de représenter sont pour la plupart angoissantes, voire terrifiantes » (Asibong, 2009 : 137). Elles ne sont jamais banales car elles organisent leurs propres modes de fonctionnement et cette particularité va engendrer la psychopathologie ou s'organiser autour d'un trouble du comportement préexistant :

> La famille, en tant que groupe structuré, organise spontanément son fonctionnement et détermine ses règles. La structure d'une famille donnée est comparable à une autre sur certains points, différente sur d'autres.
>
> Certaines de ces règles sont communes et rencontrées dans la plupart des familles. Cela n'empêche pas qu'elles soient transgressées, incomprises, inassimilables dans une proportion notable de familles, surtout souffrantes, conflictuelles ou dont un membre présente une pathologie grave. (Lemaire, 1989 : 79)

C'est justement ce type de famille que Marie NDiaye a choisi d'explorer sur scène, un groupe structuré qui s'organise pour ne devenir « qu'une terrible structure à produire dettes et névroses, culpabilité et désirs de fuite ou de meurtre » (Rabaté, 2008 : 32). Les familles scéniques de Marie NDiaye évoquent les mythes grecs et les origines du théâtre à travers un univers primitif et violent, où la famille est perçue comme l'antre où se créent les monstres moraux. Aujourd'hui, si les fêtes foraines n'exhibent plus de monstres, le théâtre contemporain les expose sur scène.

L'œuvre dramatique de Marie NDiaye est un univers singulier, peuplé de personnages extrêmement forts, dont les personnalités quasi pathologiques frôlent le monstrueux après avoir vécu dans des familles anxiogènes. La qualité des détails décrivant les personnages des

pièces étudiées touche à la description clinique sans toutefois s'enfermer dans une étude psychiatrique. L'auteur fait preuve d'une grande connaissance de la psyché humaine et de ses recoins les plus sombres.

Ce qui interpelle le lecteur/spectateur, par-delà la fascination que peuvent exercer les monstres (à l'image des exhibitions d'autrefois), c'est ce passage de la monstration simple à la pièce de théâtre. Marie NDiaye, plutôt que de chercher à satisfaire un certain voyeurisme, donne une dimension plus générale à ses textes puisqu'elle fait coïncider la scène de théâtre avec l'« autre scène » (Freud, 2011 : 589), expression utilisée par Freud pour évoquer l'inconscient. Cette coïncidence, plus qu'une simple astuce d'écriture, permet de faire se rencontrer la fascination du public (les monstres) et les obsessions de l'auteur (la famille) en un ensemble dramatique.

Depuis l'avènement de la psychanalyse et de la génétique, les liens étroits qui existent entre la famille et le monstre (dans sa version moderne) sont devenus évidents et Marie NDiaye sait très bien comment exhiber, sur un plateau de théâtre, ce qu'elle appelle le « noyau indestructible » – autrefois réservé à l'« autre scène » freudienne – même si ce noyau se révèle parfois destructeur.

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Hunger, Monstrosity, and Race in Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching*

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Helen Oyeyemi is a British-Nigerian writer whose works explore fluid articulations of ethnicity, race, and identity. In her third novel, *White is for Witching* (2009), a White British girl, Miranda, and her Black British friend Oreare are "devoured" by the cycle of oppression and consumption enacted by Miranda's forefathers upon their Black servants. Thus, the difficulty of upholding racial and ethnical binary oppositions becomes the main recurrent theme in Oyeyemi's novels and short fiction. By extensively using folklore and mythology, Oyeyemi delves into the human psyche to explore the universal fear of the Other, and the construction of identity. Most importantly, her novels seek to find out whether globalization and the readily available access to other cultures have facilitated or hindered genuine communication. Focusing on intercultural hybridity and communication, her novels strongly encourage a postcolonial interpretation. *White is for Witching* tackles borders and the construction of borders as part of racial and national identity. This article will seek to analyze and deconstruct the consumption of the Black Body as a representation of racial anxieties and transgenerational trauma, while also looking into the transformations performed by Helen Oyeyemi on the Gothic genre in an attempt to accommodate postcolonial narratives. In trying to tread the fine line between fiction and reality, the personal and the collective, Miranda and Ore's story will be explored in order to reinforce the issue of liminality and the novel's articulation of the "transatlantic Gothic" (Porter, 2013: 23). The article will call into question the relationship between race and its representations, while also highlighting the role of imagination in the delineation of group identity.

Keywords

postcolonialism; feminism; corporeality; the Gothic; monstrosity.

Postcolonialism is a critical framework that seeks to reassess and deconstruct the relationship between colonizer/colonized, master/servant, as part of the dynamics of formerly colonized territories. Its name might be misleading at first glance, but postcolonialism is not concerned with defining identities detached from the experience of colonialism, but within the latter. Thus, the scope of postcolonialism extends to the integration of all those social and cultural interactions that occur between the colonial system and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the colonial system and its subjects, on the other hand. ("Subject" here is not used to refer solely to colonized people, as both "masters" and "servants" were subordinate to the colonial system).

A number of pioneers gave postcolonialism its theoretical grounding. In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said developed a theory of the construction of the colonized Other by analyzing the Western view of "the East". Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of power-knowledge, Said revealed the ideology underlying the West's domination of "the East" (Sharp, 2008: 16). By claiming "knowledge of the Orient", European colonizers justified their oppression of Eastern peoples under imperial colonies (17). Constructed as an Other to be manipulated and controlled, the "Oriental" subject's identity was dismissed and submitted to the colonizer's identity: "The ideology of Empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason, and recruited science and history to serve its ends" (Said, 1978: 6).

Gayatri Spivak introduced the term "subaltern" to refer to "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism" (Kock, 1992: 45-46), and also expanded on Foucault's theories of docile bodies and epistemic violence to criticize the reinforcement of Western ideologies by means of cultural oppression. She drew attention to the importance of race in what is called "the triple colonization" of women of color or Third World Women (47). These women encounter a three-fold oppression enacted first by the colonial system, secondly by the patriarchal system, and thirdly by white women: "Subaltern [woman] must always be caught in translation, never [allowed to be] truly expressing herself" (Sharp, 2008: 111).

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity was particularly important in deconstructing the colonizer/colonized binary. The interconnectedness of colonizer and colonized cultures in the postcolonial space is made clear by Bhabha's assertion that there exists no possibility for cultural "purity" in a world where all cultures are born in a "Third Space of enunciation" (1994: 54): "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (55). Bhabha further brings into discussion the problematic nature of hybridity – in its "questioning of the images and presences of authority", hybridity can lead to "colonial anxiety" (162). Hybridity as a site for cultural anxieties lies at the core of narratives that allow colonizer and colonized cultures to interact and negotiate meaning in a third space. Using a primarily European tradition, the postcolonial Gothic in *White is for Witching* is such a narrative that subverts expectations of colonizer/colonized dynamics (Paravisini-Gebert, 2002: 233).

Miscegenation considered as the fear of "racial impurity" represents one of the many tensions that can be articulated by the postcolonial Gothic. In order to ascertain the relationship between race and cultural anxiety, it would be useful to offer a theoretical background for the Black Body (as the novel to be discussed, *White is for Witching*, tackles the tensions between Black and White identities). For the purposes of this analysis, the Black Body is used as a critical concept that designates the individual and collective "repository of experience" of people of African descent (Young, 2010: 23), born at the "confluence of history, culture, economics, geography and language" (Monhanram, 1999: xiv).

The representations and discourses centered on the Black Female Body are particularly problematic. In arguing that "no other group... has so had their identity socialized out of existence", bell hooks outlines the sheer extent to which oppressive behavior has reflected onto the Black Female Body (2015: 21). Placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy by an interplay of "sexist, racist, and classist oppression" (16), the Black woman's Body is the ultimate expression of social and cultural aggression. Reflection of the Exploiter's desire and

receptacle of the collective trauma of oppression, it has become a battlefield for the negotiation of history and power.

In the essay titled "The Site of Memory", Toni Morrison speaks in favor of imagination as factor of reconstruction of "[Black] unwritten interior life" (1995: 92). It could be said that the reconstruction of England as a Gothic space enables the confrontation with geographical spaces rooted in suffering and loss, and seeks to reconcile both Black and White bodies as sites of trauma. This new emphasis on the repercussions of trauma on both White and Black bodies allows for the study of what has been recently called "postcolonial whiteness" (Lopez, 2005: 2).

Given that the Body reflects social tensions and dynamics in specific temporal and spatial frameworks (Hancock, 2000: 10), the Black Body explored and interrogated in this paper conveys the relationship between Black British people and British history. Objectified as early as the first contacts with the Western world and subjected to multiple forms of physical violence ever since (lynching, castration, rape, branding, mutilation, whipping, profiling, policing, disproportionate arrest and incarceration) (Yancy, 2016: xxxi), the Black Body has been the site of White racial projections and "imaginaries" (105) to the point where the destiny of the Black man became White (Fanon, 2008: 10). Since the othering of Black bodies persists in conjunction with the structural violence of institutionalized racism (Weissinger *et al.*, 2017: 175), it is essential to analyze the ability of the Black Body to reclaim and transform violence within the ideological frame of the British society.

She split cleanly, from head to toe: **Race and the Consumption of *Otherness***

The first portrayal of Miranda, the White British protagonist, uses the narrative technique of prolepsis to depict the young woman buried in the ground of her family's manor: "Miranda Silver is in Dover, in the ground beneath her mother's house. / Her throat is blocked with a slice of apple/ (to stop her speaking words that may betray her)/ her ears are filled with earth/ (to keep her from hearing sounds that will confuse her/ her eyes are closed, but/ her heart thrums hard" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 1). This foray into Miranda's identity seems to articulate a sense of environment-related fatalism, characteristic of Gothic narratives, as the deep connection with the familial grounds seems to suggest that her identity can only be defined in relation to her heritage. Surprisingly, this first perspective on Miranda belongs to her British Nigerian friend and lover, Ore. By choosing to open the story from a marginal perspective, the text marks its clear intention to shift attention from Gothic foreshadowing and plot to multiperspectivism and interpretation. Rather than presenting Miranda's destiny and the harrowing consequences of her disobedience (suggested by the necessity of silence), the narrative seeks to illuminate the relevance of borders and the dynamics of interrelated perspectives on border-making.

The narrators fleshing out the facts of this impenetrable tale include Eliot (Miranda's twin brother), Miranda herself, Luc Dufresne (Miranda's father), Ore, Sade (the family's housekeeper), and even the Silver House itself. Throughout their accounts, there is a recurrent emphasis on whiteness, albeit in different contexts. By reviewing some early representations of whiteness, one might become acquainted with how the Silver-Dufresne family perceive their own race and skin color. Eliot associates whiteness with blood when recounting his mother's encounter with the Haitian culture, a formerly colonized territory: "I tried to picture our mother in Haiti and I saw her in a tower built of guns, heaving with voodoo, creepy gods and white feathers tipped with blood" (5). This strange connection between blood and whiteness is pursued by Eliot in a portrayal of his sister's skin that eerily evokes violence and trauma: "She

slid up out of the covers, gasping, her face mottled pink and white as if she had come from a place of burning" (7). Since white is a predominant color in Eliot's description of his mother and sister, it seems fit to assert that whiteness is a signpost of health and familial well-being whose destabilization might undermine the coherence of group identity.

Spatial descriptions also speak to this debt to whiteness, as the Gothic abode in the novel is a safeguard of white racial purity. On relocating to the Silver House, Luc Dufresne is deemed appropriate as a resident due to his pallor: "Luc Dufresne is not tall. He is pale and the sun fails on his skin. (…) His fingers are ruined by too close and careless contact with heat" (13). When Luc decides to turn his wife's inheritance into a bed-and-breakfast, the house does not offer itself without a clear reminder of the ideal it dearly protects. Affirming hereditary power over Luc's ignorance of its past, the manor presents its whiteness as both welcoming and menacing: "From the outside the windows didn't look as if they could be opened (…) they were funny square eyes, friendly, tired. (…) The steps leading up to the house bulge with fist-sized lumps of grey-white flint, each piece a knife to cut your knee open should you slip" (17).

Interestingly, the hunger for whiteness is extended to the larger chronotope inhabited by the White British family, as it is part of their relationship to inherited time and space. "White" seems to belong in the geological structure of their town, Dover, in the form of chalk: "Across the cliffs, Dover Castle was (…) hunched in a black mess of shapes, and the vast bank of chalk it stood on seemed to stir in the water as if fighting the darkness that tried to climb down it" (80). The centrality of whiteness to racial imagination is further illustrated by references to British popular culture: Miranda's space is fatally marked as white in the "White Cliffs of Dover" lullaby (which was ironically used by the British National Party in an anti-immigration campaign) (Stephanou, 2014: 1248), while the patriotic song "Rule, Britannia!" is brought up in connection with embodiment of whiteness and British xenophobia:

> [Lily's grandmother had] been picked to wear a bronze-coloured helmet and a white gown (…). Britannia had to have pluck. Anna never thought she would have a granddaughter who didn't know what Britannia meant; Lily said that patriotism was embarrassing and dangerous (…). How had Britannia become embarrassing and dangerous? It was the incomers. They had twisted it so that anything they were not part of was bad. (Oyeyemi, 2009: 115-116)

Faced with her parents' ignorance of their racist past, a matrilineal heritage of white supremacy, and a popular culture riddled with laudatory images of her skin color, Miranda is forced to find a way to navigate the embodiment of whiteness. The silence which enshrouds her may well hint to her confusion and unconscious participation in this game of racial superiority, and some of the "actors" leading to her demise are brought in to make sense of her story. To the question of why Miranda has suddenly disappeared, Ore replies that "she chose this as the only way to fight the soucouyant" (1), thus placing the blame on a mythological creature who takes up residence in Miranda. In his turn, Eliot finds fault with a pie Miranda refused to eat and remarks upon his sister's fragile mental and physical health (2).

While Miranda's mental instability further complicates her internalization of racial norms, Eliot's assessment seems to indicate an eating disorder: "'Why did you use the winter apples?' She asked it over and over. (…) She looked in my direction but she couldn't seem to focus on me. She was the thinnest I'd ever seen her. (…) She hugged herself, her fingers pinning her dress to her ribs. There was an odd smell to her, heavy and thick" (2). Noticeably, the sentient

Gothic house (Starling, 2014: 5) offers a medically informed explanation that at first glance may seem to clarify Miranda's condition. In light of all these accounts, the protagonist's eating disorder resembles both self-destruction and unbridled consumption: "Miranda is (…) homesick (…) Miranda has pica she can't come in today, she is stretched out inside a wall she is feasting on plaster" (3). While directly relating Miranda to the plight she is indicted with, this excerpt also questions Miranda's role in the complex relationship between her and her racial past, the latter embodied in the Silver House.

Pica is, indeed, an eating disorder characterized by an appetite for non-edible substances (Walsh *et al.*, 2015: 17), but this explanation does not clarify the reason behind Miranda's unusual hunger. In the context of authority over Miranda's illness, Eliot unwittingly mentions a generalized hunger and references the discourse of consumption involving master/servant, male/female, White/Black: "The argument was a stupid one that opened up a murky little mouth to take in other things (…). She wouldn't eat any of it, and she wouldn't let me" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 2). The Silver House thus embodies a patriarchal system of power relations reinforced by a line of matriarchs (Stephanou, 2014: 1245). The controlling stance of the Gothic household is rendered literal in Miranda's encounter with the object of her consumption, the chalk also found in the "white cliffs of Dover": "That first day, Miri found something on the floor of that room she'd picked as hers (…) just after she dropped it into her pocket she sucked thoughtfully at her finger. (…) finally she sighed and showed me. It was a ball of chalk" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 20).

Miranda's condition is normalized by her parents as an inevitable hereditary disease: " Lily told all our teachers at primary school and all the dinner ladies knew. (…) Dad was relieved that Miri didn't mean to be rebellious" (22). The house dwellers of non-British origin – the Silvers' Turkish domestic workers and their daughters, Suryaz and Deme – provide an important corrective to the parents' representation of Miranda's disease, in that they represent a non-White counterpoint to the aforementioned normalization of hereditary evil. Thus, both Miranda's twin brother and the houseguests are mystified about the underlying motives of this disease, and their powerful reactions to Miranda's fascination with chalk acknowledge the strange and menacing nature of her condition: "Once (…) I was thinking of sampling her chalk to see what the big wow was" (23); "[Miranda] watched Deme's eyes move from her books to the sticks of chalk that she kept in a Marlboro cigarette box" (56). It is interesting to analyze who is still intrigued by Miranda's condition – on the one hand, the twin is considered to be an alter ego of the protagonist in Gothic writings (Snodgrass, 2014: 84), on the other hand, Suryaz and Deme display an Otherness to Miranda's White British identity. By associating Miranda's Self with the Other, the text strangely creates a scenario of consumption whereby Miranda is othered to her own illness.

A whole history of abusive consumption marks Miranda as the last survivor of a white imaginary tradition she must rekindle. The Silver House traces back these unusual habits to Miranda's great-grandmother, Anna Good, whose husband was killed in Africa during the Second World War while fighting the Germans. She tried to bring him back to life by invoking "racial prejudice" (Stephanou, 2014: 1247) but was refused, so she birthed the Silver House as an embodiment of her fear of the Other: "'I hate them (…) Blackies, Germans, killers, dirty… dirty killers. (…) Bring him back, bring him back, bring him back to me'. (…) She spoke from that part of her that was older than her. (…) They shouldn't be allowed in though, those others, so eventually I make them leave" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 118). Interestingly, hunger for whiteness is also related to status anxiety within the white race: Anna Good's pica and hunger

for whiteness go back to one year before her marriage to Andrew Silver, a well-off man (and "someone important") (116) for whom Anna did not feel "white" enough. The ideal of racial purity is revealed to be a vicious circle of "incomplete" whiteness that eventually entails the self-destruction of the consumer: "Anna Good had it in 1938; a year before she became Anna Silver. She ruined her work stockings and skirt while crouching in the mud (…). She ate leaves by the handful and chipped her teeth on pebbles (…). The house is Andrew's, she told herself; I have no part in it" (23).

Her daughter, Jennifer, was punished for leaving home and trying to lead a different life; on her return, she was condemned to live in isolation, and the only thing she could see – a white light – eventually incapacitated her. Jennifer was released only when she had bitten her fingers off and started consuming "branches from the garden": "I closed the door behind her. It was the best sort of winter morning, cold but bright. That was the only sort of light Jennifer saw after that – it came through great windows and she couldn't find her way away from them and out of me. (…) She was dazed" (84). Jennifer's daughter and Miranda's mother, Lily, did not suffer from pica, but engaged in a form of "bloodless but dangerous" consumption which also characterized the colonizers (Stephanou, 2014: 1253). She was a photographer who consumed people and places with her gaze while remaining unscathed (1248). This prompt action upon the colonized speaks to the initial ideal embodied by the Silver matriarchs – a form of consumption that would simply annihilate the Other while leaving the consumer whole and pure: "Lily's eye transformed places. (…) [She] was the changer who came home the same" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 5); "There were people in the photos (…) but they were there minus everything that was ungainly about them. They were in the picture but their bodies weren't" (105).

All these forms of consumption are articulated in the image of the "goodlady", the Silver women's ancestor who would only eat her own body: "Her way was to drink off her blood, then bite and suck at the bobbled stubs of meat" (24). This "auto-vampirism" was often interpreted as a means of preserving the purity of white blood (Stephanou, 2014: 1249). Alternatively, the text also suggests self-destructive narcissism in relation to an idealized whiteness which, ironically, cannot be located in time or space: "Her appetite was only for herself (…). I do not know the year, or even how I know this" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 24). Again, the "burial" metaphor is very relevant in dissecting the relationship with the Other. On the one hand, her self-consumption might signal her desire to reach out to the prohibited Other, articulated in the patriarchal fear of miscegenation (Newman, 2009: 41); on the other hand, by consuming her own body, she might acknowledge her desire to reach the Other in herself: "Her way was to slash at her flesh with the blind, frenzied concentration that a starved person might use to get at food that is buried" (24).

These conflicting urges inherent in the act of consumption are silenced as part of racial memory, graphically rendered in the scene of the Silver women's dinner. In a scenario emulating the return of the repressed (Stephanou, 2014: 1247), the matriarchs appear to Miranda with "padlocks placed over their parted mouths, boring through the top lip and closing at the bottom" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 127). Incapable of fulfilling their desires, the women urge Miranda to devour otherness and redeem their hatred for the Other and the Self: "'Eat for us', Jennifer slurred through her padlock. (…) The way the fingers twitched, she got a sense that they weren't attached to a body, only to each other (…). The hands were brown. Jalil's party trick hands" (128-129). Miranda enters their game and even accepts the padlock gifted by Lily as a token of silence (Stephanou, 2014: 1252). This episode proves to be crucial to

Miranda's evolution. After reenacting the traumatic experience of consumption, Miranda acknowledges her foremothers' role in carving her identity, while also confessing to a fear of becoming them: "She didn't look into the mirror itself. She was becoming someone, it seemed. She had read somewhere that you only became a woman once your mother had died. But that wasn't what worried her. She worried about becoming as perfect as the person shown to her on paper in Lily's studio" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 132).

This episode is followed by Miranda's move to Cambridge University and her encounter with Ore, a British-Nigerian colleague who becomes her lover. This relocation from the site of trauma (the Silver House) finally allows Miranda to "manage" her consumption (Stephanou, 2014: 1253; Oyeyemi, 2009: 170). Although their relationship initially resembles the toxic consumption of her white ancestors, Miranda is the first to acknowledge the ambivalent condition of being a consumer of otherness, and this time it is love, rather than hatred, that consumes. In an attempt to protect Ore from her potential "monstrosity" (Stephanou, 2014: 1254), Miranda realizes that the goodlady's auto-vampirism was a means of preventing intimacy with the Other (Oyeyemi, 2009: 192). Ore, in her turn, admits that Miranda's hunger for otherness is both hurtful and fascinating (213). Ironically, Ore's last attempt to free Miranda from the projections of her ancestors mirrors the perpetual search for the Other defining all cultures. In trying to free her lover from the "white specter" (King, 2013: 60) inhabiting her, Ore strangely replicates the goodlady's wish to unearth the Other buried in her flesh:

> She tensed, and I cracked her open like a bad nut with a glutinous shell. She split, and cleanly, from head to toe. There was another girl inside her, the girl from the photograph, all long straight hair and pretty pearlescence. This other girl wailed. 'No, no, why did you do this? Put me back in'. She gathered the halves of her shed skin and tried to fit them back together across herself. I fell down and watched her, amazed, from where I sat. (Oyeyemi, 2009: 230)

***She was one of those Gothic victims*: Postcolonialism and the Consumption of Genres**

White is for Witching was directly inspired by a Gothic classic, as Helen Oyeyemi herself confessed, but the novel prefaced by Gwendolyn Brooks' poem of hunger and hell speaks to more than a mere Gothic story: "I hold my honey and I store my bread/ In little jars and cabinets of my will/ I label clearly, and each latch and lid/ I bid, Be firm till I return from Hell" (*apud* Oyeyemi I). The Gothic here is clearly meant to explore the darkness and fear associated with the encounter with otherness:

> I wanted to write a vampire story. After I graduated, I volunteered in South Africa for a few months. (…) everyone wanted to talk about race all the time. I started to feel strange … I got this flu-like illness and spent a lot of time in bed with Dracula (…) I started thinking that vampire stories were a lot to do with the fear of the outsider, because you've got this foreign count with this unnatural appetite (…) I thought, what's an unnatural appetite? A girl who eats chalk, but probably with a desire to eat something else. (Machell, 2009 *apud* Stephanou, 2014: 1245)

White is for Witching observes the Gothic tradition in a number of ways. Character-wise, it revolves around twins Miranda and Eliot, also retrievable in the trope of the "double". They

further confirm the paradigm by subscribing to the sane/insane binary defining the Gothic twin couple. An intertextual relationship with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" would not be amiss here. Eliot resembles Roderick Usher's sensitivity and penchant for art, as he employs poetry to mourn his mother's death: "Eliot had refused to go on holiday without Lily and spent much of August up on the roof wearing a black balaclava and writing poetry, which he then balled up and threw as far and as hard as he could" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 121).

Miranda, just like Roderick's sister Madeline, is troubled by a disease whose secret Eliot cannot (or does not want to) dispel: "[Miranda was] gone so deep into sleep that she seemed part of the wall behind her, a girl-shaped texture rising from the plaster in an unrepeated pattern" (7). However, it would be an oversimplification to reduce their dynamics to a misunderstood "melancholic" (Cousins, 2012: 49) who slightly struggles with identity issues and a female hysteric who embodies the male fear of moral transgression. (As the text will later show, neither male nor female are exempt from fluidity and transformation).

As far as setting is concerned, the epicenter of uncanny events lies in the Silver House, belonging to three generations of Silver women and currently a bed-and-breakfast owned by the twins' father, Luc Dufresne. The disturbingly sentient nature of the house is established in the first chapters: windows like "funny, square eyes, friendly, tired", steps of "grey-white flint", as sharp as "knives", and marble fireplaces that would invite one to "crawl" inside (Oyeyemi, 2009: 17). The location of the Silver House also asserts its role as "the site where fears and anxieties return in the present" (Botting, 1996: 3 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 49). Situated in Dover, "the gateway to England" (Cousins, 2012: 48), this Gothic house is "concerned" with maintaining familial integrity in the face of imminent "degeneration" by otherness. This identity in need of protection has strong links to race and ethnicity, as it is made clear by Luc and Eliot's discussion of the immigrants' position in Dover: "'Since we're talking about family here. Family. And say you knew who had hurt someone in your family and you also knew that the police had the power to stop and punish it. You really wouldn't say anything?'" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 31).

The authority held by family over all other forms of identity is reinforced by yet another Gothic trope – the ghost as embodiment of the family's long-held ideals, ideals that are to be pursued by the present generation. In *White is for Witching*, it is "the goodlady", a self-cannibalistic female spirit, who is endowed with three generations' desire for racial and ethnical dominance. Defined as a "specter of whiteness" (King, 2013: 60), she repeatedly repels otherness by threatening to consume non-white persons inside and outside the Silver House: "[In the Dover Post] there was Tijana's cousin's name, Agim Hajdari. He'd sustained serious wounds but had recovered. He'd been found curled up in a ball between a wall and a tree (…) arms crossed over himself. As if to hold his insides in" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 91).

With the English white as the good Self and the Migrant non-white as the evil Other, the novel easily joins the ranks of Dracula as a Gothic narrative of "reverse colonization" (Arata, 1990: 623 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 48). However, it is worth noting that the monstrous Other (Craft, 1984: 107 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 53) and the evil-fighting heroine are reversed in this text, as both Miranda and the goodlady inhabiting her are monstrous in their sustenance methods and the violence thereof. The goodlady is a vampire feeding on her own blood, whose hunger for otherness is passed on to Miranda as hunger for non-edible substances (pica). Already, the text undermines binaries underpinning traditional Gothic stories, such as good/evil, insider/outsider.

The relationship with the Gothic genre is further complicated by the "intrusion" of elements belonging to the Other culture, introduced by Oyeyemi as a key aspect to the understanding of the text. The novel resorts to more than one culture to make sense of its Gothic construction, and its characters also delve into various cultures in response to traumatic experiences. One such character is Sade. As the Silvers' Nigerian housekeeper, her approach to Miranda's illness connects English and Yoruba beliefs in the supernatural. Miranda and Sade's first interaction is relevant to this point. Miranda's "chronic insomnia" (Cousins, 2012: 50) is articulated in two different manners towards the same interpretation. It is staged as the goodlady's nightly haunting by the Gothic narrator: "There was an especial horror in lying with her eyes closed (…) she saw (…) the woman in the trapdoor-room sitting directly beneath the fireplace, delicately wiping her beautiful mouth again and again" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 95). Sade, in her turn, relates the ailment to a form of miscommunication with the ancestors: "They're calling you, aren't they? (…) old ones calling (…) I know it's hard" (96).

The girl first refuses to acknowledge her trouble, then seeks to find out more from Sade, who "look[s] so alarmed that Miranda th[inks] the topic must be the utmost taboo" (96). Miranda's quandary is thus riddled with irony – her foremothers devour her but remain unreachable, while she is left feeling hungry for "something else" (Machell, 2009 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 51). Her dialogue with Sade seems to continue on the same note of misunderstanding. When Sade goes on to make a juju figure, Miranda notices that "it look[s] like two hanged men holding fast to each other" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 97). Sade simply tells her that "something is wrong", and Miranda interprets it as a bad omen "worked against her" (97-98), reinforcing her responsibility towards her mothers. One may well point to this consuming guilt as the typical fate of the Gothic heroine drowning in her own hereditary monstrosity. However, by refusing to clarify Miranda's relationship to the past, both Gothic and Yoruba "interpreter" seem to imply that the young woman is mistaken in trying to construct her identity in relation to any system of beliefs but her own. The domestic thus becomes a site for the negotiation and demythologization of trauma.

The ancestors' role is also highlighted in the family gathering scene, where Miranda's foremothers urge her to "Eat for us" (128) – she would thus perform the consumptive act necessary to their survival and restore the family's glorious past. In her analysis of *White is for Witching* as a hybrid form of Gothic, Helen Cousins superimposes the Yoruban myth of the abiku over the Silver women's tradition of unnatural consumption (2012: 51). As she further explains, the "evil spirits" of abiku are hungry because they have been deprived of the due sacrificial offerings (Ellis, 1894 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 51). One abiku may replace the spirit of a new-born child and provide, for the rest of the abiku group, "the greater part of the food that the child eats" (Ellis, 1894 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 51). This interpretation is particularly significant in the context of the Silvers' consumption of otherness. The matriarchs devour the Other but also thrive on it, so the negative connotations associated with "difference" are further destabilized. Moreover, the "sacrifice" that the foremothers have not received over the past generations may signal a sacrifice that they have not been able to perform to themselves – that is, they have not been willing to relinquish part of their identity and grapple with the hybridity of their Englishness.

Throughout the text, we are informed that there have been non-English members in each generation of Silver women (Cousins, 2012: 53). Grand Anna's husband and the first owner of the Silver House was an England-schooled American, an "almost English" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 116); their daughter Jennifer is presumed to have "run off with someone dashing and foreign, a

different dashing and foreign to whoever Lily's dad had been" (71); and Luc, Lily's husband and the twins' father, is of French descent (59) (Cousins, 2012: 53-54). Given the context of the family's actual origins, the abusive consumption of otherness that the Silvers perform could be viewed as a substitute for the genuine interaction with their own otherness. Alternatively, their unfulfilled desire for otherness ("'Miranda (…) what will you eat?' (…) She knew, but she couldn't say it") (Oyeyemi, 2009: 127; Cousins, 2012: 51) becomes a fascination for the "pleasure and danger" of otherness, manifested as unnatural consumption (hooks, 1992: 26 *apud* Stephanou, 2014: 1254). This interpretation blending Gothic and Yoruba tropes presents the postcolonial Gothic as more than just a site for the reenactment of trauma produced by societal pressure. The Other is also revealed to be a construct, derived from repressed desires for otherness sublimated through imagination.

Witchcraft is yet another supernatural practice sustaining the Yoruba-Gothic backbone of the text. One cannot fail to notice that the title, *White is for Witching*, is a direct reference to Jamaican Herbert George DeLisser's novel, *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929) (Stephanou, 2014: 1246). The story tackles the legend of Annie Palmer, a white slave-holder who cannibalized slaves (and thus became a witch). While witchcraft is not thoroughly explored as a main issue in *White is for Witching*, "the witch" as socio-cultural construct is called into question a number of times. The Silver House itself claims that it is not Anna Good's abnormal appetite that renders her monstrous, but her fear of monstrosity: "Anna Good it was not your pica that made you into a witch. (…) Indeed you are a mother of mine, you gave me a kind of life" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 24). According to the same account, Anna uses her feminine, vulnerable whiteness to "ensnare" Andrew Silver and become his wife. She feels both guilty and fascinated about absorbing male power:

> When Anna met Andrew she was wearing a cream-coloured dress, the material having been the cheapest she's seen on sale (…). He didn't speak to her, but he looked at her for longer than was polite, and she knew that they had met now. She inspected the entire front of her dress once he was gone, convinced that some vast stain had left her and entered the cloth. (…) White is for witching, a colour to be worn so that all other colours can enter you, so that you may use them. At a pinch, cream will do. (116-117)

Feeling uncleanly and unworthy of her wealthy, well-educated husband, Anna projects her fears of othering on the non-English who kill him in Second World War (118). The Silver House seems to imply that this first expulsion of otherness is an act of witchcraft that transforms space into a site of xenophobia (117). As illustrated before, Sade uses Yoruba practices to make sense and clear out this bewitchment. Most importantly, she points out to Miranda that witches desire "things that don't have names" (116) and that the young woman needs to find out for herself how to interact with the object of the witch's desire. Remarkably, in the Yoruba practice of aje witchcraft, white is the color of "transcendence" (Washington, 2005: 29 *apud* Cousins, 2012: 50), asserting the positive significance of transgression to (and integration of) otherness. Therefore, "witching" as construct becomes a space where attitudes towards the Other can be analyzed, and resentment towards otherness, dispelled.

Insofar, both the Silver House and White is for Witching have been proved to be Gothic-informed constructs defined by cultural hybridity rather than purely European traditions. Furthermore, Miranda as a Gothic heroine is also redefined as a postcolonial subject. First, the Gothic tropes of the double and the heredity-bound protagonist are transformed by Oyeyemi

to signify the fragmentary, unstable nature of postmodern identity (Cousins, 2012: 51-52): "she could strip him down to true red (…) (no he's eliot eliot is me we were once one cell)/ he would be sour" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 238); "[s]he looked at her reflection and saw a cube instead, four stiff faces in one" (129). The protagonist is not simply mirrored by her environment, she produces and consumes spaces: "Please understand. We are the goodlady (…). The house and I" (218). At best, her presence inside and outside the house at the end of the novel – she is both "in the ground beneath her mother's house" (1) and "stretched out inside a wall (…) feasting on plaster" (3) – reflects the fragmentariness of England as a postcolonial space (Cousins, 2012: 57).

The construction of a liminal space where Miranda could confront her own mixed identity falls to Ore, a British-Nigerian young woman who was adopted and raised by English parents and who willfully consumes white English culture (Stephanou, 2014: 1249) (thus breaking the cycle of oppressive acculturation): "I sat cross-legged in front of the TV with Mum and Dad (…) watching *EastEnders* and eating so much cake I couldn't taste it" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 199). As Miranda is more and more troubled by the past/present split, Ore becomes aware that her friend's identity is confined by the socio-cultural values of the dominant framework: "The girl was one of those Gothic victims, the child-woman who is too pretty and good for this world and ends up dying of tuberculosis or grief – a sweet heart-shaped face and a river of blue-black hair" (162).

Ore's alternative to the Gothic vampiric woman is the Caribbean soucouyant, a female spirit who sheds her skin before turning into a devourer (Stephanou, 2014: 1246). The soucouyant is "not content with her self" and "a double danger – there is the danger of meeting her, and the danger of becoming her" (Oyeyemi, 2009: 155), therefore it embodies a fluidity that Miranda can use to explore her own liminality. By spending time with Ore in the space the latter constructed, Miranda can experience the contradictory feelings that otherness elicits in her. She acknowledges her multifaceted desire for othermess, as her love for Ore is equal parts sadness, fascination, and fear: "Miranda had needed Ore open. Her head had spun with the desire to taste. She lay her head against Ore's chest and heard Ore's heart. The beat was ponderous. Like an oyster, living quietly in its serving-dish shell, this heart barely moved. Miranda could have taken it, she knew she could. Ore would have hardly felt it" (191).

In short, the White/Black and good/evil binaries are not merely reversed, but destabilized and transgressed. Emulating the Gothic story where they play out, race and desire are emotionally charged "fictions" and fluid spaces. Just like in *Wuthering Heights*, a Gothic classic referenced in *White is for Witching*, the Margin both destabilizes and empowers the Center – Nelly Dean allows Lockwood the respite of catharsis by telling him the story of the place, while Sade and Ore empower Miranda to build a space where they can all experience and negotiate the traumatic past. Most remarkably, at the end of the story, all characters, whether male or female, English or Nigerian, are left wondering about the impact of Miranda's transformation upon their own identities.

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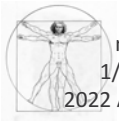

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Unseen Monsters: *The Horla* by Guy de Maupassant

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Keywords

gothic; monster; the other; unconsciousness; hallucinations; hypnotism; mental illness.

As fear is a common trope that dominates the Gothic genre, it embodies subconscious manifestations of anxieties, relationships, and beliefs. There is a resistance against the simplification of fear, as the intimate workings of the mind provide a unique insight onto this trope. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the infiltration of a monster into the life of an unnamed man, driving him to suicide. Taking on the short story, *The Horla* by Guy de Maupassant, and focusing on how the balance between real and unreal is created, the present study aims to will prove that fear can influence the emotional and mental state of an individual, bringing upon hallucinations, paranoia, and extreme actions. Even more so, taking into consideration the author's personal struggles with mental health will help provide an extra layer of understanding the narrator of the short story, as the real-life experiences of the author are mirrored in the tale.

I. Introduction

The Gothic genre has always provided society with the monsters it needed. Every generation managed to relay a monster which proved capable of portraying its anxieties, fears, or primal desires. We place Guy de Maupassant's *The Horla* under the umbrella of the French Gothic, although more than not, the critical approaches to this short story are associated with Realism or Naturalism. The scope of analysis of this paper is to focus on the Gothic elements it brings forward.

Realism deals with the common life, the depictions of everyday society, often depicting characters and situations without the sentimentalism of Romanticism attached to it. (Hollier, 1989: 715). It grew in tandem with other developments in science, industrialism, and social sciences. We can see how this movement is represented in Maupassant's writings, in his clear depictions of individuals and their social classes, to even the causes for an individual's actions. In *The Horla*, the main character is the narrator, an unnamed man who is well off, has his own house and servants. His life is rather ordinary, until he begins being haunted by an unseen monster, one named Horla. However, it remains to be discussed whether the monster is real or if the story is actually about the decline of a sound mind.

When talking about the Gothic genre as it is today (and also to help better understand the topics which will be further discussed), it is important to look at its' beginnings. To do so, a glance towards Romanticism and Dark Romanticism will be valuable. During the Romantic the individual, his or her emotions and the beauty of nature were main themes in the art world. The emotions of the author that had been poured into a piece of art are considered of utmost value. Looking at the article devoted to Dark Romanticism, we observe that one of the mottos of the period regarded the creation of "art for art's sake", and in doing this, the artists have tried to eliminate the idea that art needed to serve a purpose or a function. An artist's liberty to create was also considered to be precious: the artist followed his own need to create, not the request of a patron. (Contributors, 2017).

Dark Romanticism, as a literary movement, found its dark roots in the idea that the beliefs of Romanticism and Transcendentalism were "far too optimistic and egotistical" (Contributors, 2017). The authors of the Dark Romantic genre are seen as individuals who were more inclined to sin, to self-destruct and to turn away from religion. G.R. Thompson believed that they had not completely turned their backs to religion, but rather they had given it a new shape; the evil was now "in the form of Satan, devils, ghosts, vampires, and ghouls." (Contributors, 2017). They also showcase nature under a darker light, as it is now "dark, decaying, and mysterious; [and] when it does reveal truth to man, its revelations are evil and hellish." (Contributors, 2017) and no longer divine and a universal organic mediator.

From a literary point of view, the terms "gothic" and "goth" are related to tales which had been situated in Southern European settings, crude, and barbaric individual pairs with the Catholic and its ceremonial overabundance. On an opposite side, we can see the Northern European settings, with their Protestant prosperity and self-restraint (Cavallaro, 2002: 7).

Davidson speaks about the development of the Gothic novels by using the terms "anachronistic" and "paradoxical". He uses the term "anachronistic" to describe the appearance of the novels because they emerged during the Enlightenment period, when most authors focused their novels on more contemporary and more "real" issues. The other term, "paradoxical" hints at the opposing link between the past and the present. It came forward as an antithesis to Enlightenment literature and its ideals of balance, reason, harmony, and order by concentration on chaos, irrationality, bizarre and dark side of what meant to be a human. In doing so, one could argue that the Gothic genre itself became "the Other". At a similar sentiment was Rosemary Jackson that provided a definition of the Gothic as "literature of unreason and terror" (Jackson 2008: .96) and she goes on to complete this point of view by arguing that it should be "seen as a reaction to historical events, particularly to the spread of industrialism and urbanization" (97). She continues to present her exposition by discussing how the Gothic had started to turn inwards and to "concern itself with psychological problems, used to dramatize uncertainty and conflicts of the individual in relation to a difficult social situation" (97). This literature had started to concern itself with what was going on within the human's mind, how the outside world affected the inside one, what anxieties and what fears it created.

Sigmund Freud developed the concept of the "uncanny" or "unheimlich" (in German) meaning unfamiliar, which "is the class of the frightening which leads back to what is known on old and long familiar" or "the repressed and the unresolved" (Freud 2010: 340) In his theory, he argues that what was once natural to an individual, but with time deeply repressed in his or her unconsciousness, can be brought back to light if the person feels overpowered by the unfamiliar and bizarre. Thus, when looking at the setting of a novel, one can see, for example, the ghosts and the haunted houses deciphered as portrayal of the uncanny of the inhibited traumas that can return to the individual when certain stress factors are in play at the same time. As such, we can look at these concepts in unison, as a way to express a character's psyche and use it as a connection to social issues that are present at a certain point in time. In Gothic literature we can look at novels from multiple modes such as realistic, uncanny, fantastic, or marvellous.

In contrast to the aforementioned relation between horror and the Gothic, it is necessary to be aware that this is not the norm of the genre. As the Gothic can definitely include "works of fiction that contain neither supernatural nor horror elements, but which do contain similar attitudes to setting, atmosphere or style" (Bloom 2010: 1)

Susanne Becker stresses the idea that the Gothic is "a genre of negatives, of the un-real, the anti-rational, the immoral" and consequently, it has been designated as "the Other, and even as feminine other to the dominant discourse" (1999: 23) She uses the word feminine after explaining that "the traditional critical coding of the non-real, the popular and emotional as feminine has perpetuated binary oppositions, with all the hierarchies this entails." (23) So to say, by managing to blur the traditionally imposed limits between what the conscious psyche is and what the unconscious psyche is, what represents our objective reality and what represents an individual's fantasy, what has a place in the past and what has a place in the present, the Gothic genre figure out how to outperform these introduced dualities, while simultaneously abandoning social constructs, such as gender roles and different types of characteristics, enabling its female characters in such a manner that rises about these demonstrations that comply with the established norms. This fits within the idea that Gothic developed a strong interest towards the offense of social and cultural norms.

II. The two versions of *The Horla*

Before diving into the concept of the monster the story created, it is noteworthy to mention that *The Horla* is a story that has been published twice, in two different formats. The first version was published in a newspaper named *Gil Blas* on the 26th of October 1886, and the second version appeared in a volume of Guy de Maupassant's literary works in 1887. The two stories centre around the same main idea, of a man's life being drained by an unseen monster. However, the style of writing and the ending are changed drastically. Reminiscing on a previously mentioned idea, that the author himself had attempted suicide, and then had been institutionalised, this can be tied into the abrupt and dark change – as his own mental health declined and he no longer saw hope, he no longer gave this hope to his characters either. (Miles, 2004: ix – xxvi)

The earlier version is shorter and shows the character in a more optimistic setting. The format follows the regular prose style, combined with narration and dialogue. The unnamed narrator is found in a clinic; he is brought forward by Doctor Marrande who depicted as "one of the most eminent psychiatrists in the country" (Maupassant, 2004: 236) to a group of men, where he is asked to talk about his experience with the Horla. This is presented to us as a grave, serious group of scientists – men who would not indulge in ghost stories – who are here to examine and take note of the mental state of this patient. Another important thing to notice in the beginning is that the narrator, as he starts to speak to the men present in the room, affirms that "For a long time he himself believed I was mad. Today he is not so sure". (236), referencing Doctor Marrande. This brings forward the idea that this man who has been asserted as a rational individual, has started believing the narrator, believing the supernatural experiences the patient has had. From here on, most of the story is similar to the one in 1887, however it lacks a few scenes which were later added and has a completely different ending. As mentioned previously, this earlier version could be seen as more optimistic, as the narrator does not end up committing suicide – the main and uttermost distinction between the two stories. This first version creates a narrator that seems to be more aware, more lucid, and more in control, as he chooses to seek help. Hence, he is presented in the story as a patient in a clinic. The ending of this version shows Doctor Marrande again, as he talks to the other men present in the room "I am in as much of a quandary as you all. I cannot tell if this man is mad or whether we both are … or whether … man's successor is already in our midst…" (244).

The later version, which ends tragically, with the narrator's suicide, brings forth the idea of decline, of degeneration, which can be tied into the author's own mental health decline, that will be discussed later on. The author chose for this second version the epistolary format – the narrator is no longer in a clinic, and we do not have any clue that his diary entries are written for anyone else than himself. From the very start, this version puts the reader in a more intimate relation with the narrator – as he gets to see the first version of his thoughts on paper and not a curated version present in front of a group. It provides a unique suspense, as the reader waits for the monster to strike alongside the narrator. This later version brings to light a different type of desperation of the character. While in the previous version, his desperation and fear had made the unnamed man seek help, the second version made him paranoid and impulsive. There is a clear and certain decline of the man in this story, which is accelerated as the monster takes over his life more and more.

More details are added to this version as well, which give insight into the interest regarding the unconscious mind and what it would allow humans to do. The narrator describes a scene, taking place on July 15 but recorded in his diary on July 16, with Dr. Parent, "who devotes himself a great deal to nervous diseases and to the extraordinary manifestations which just now experiments in hypnotism and suggestion are producing" (Maupassant, 1996: 63) and his female cousin, Madame Sable. The scene shows the Doctor putting Madame Sable under hypnosis, and thus, asking of her that the next day she should ask the narrator for "five thousand francs" (66) saying that her husband needed it. The next day, when the cousin does indeed go to the narrator's house asking him for money is a moment of crisis for him – he realises that hypnosis is a powerful tool of controlling the unconscious side of the human mind, without the conscious side ever knowing. The narrator ends describing this as such "this experiment has altogether upset me" (69), leaving out more input for what is to come. This entire scene is a foreshadowing one of what the narrator experiences at the hands of the Horla, as he is unable to move his own body at will, to do as he wishes, to escape as he wishes. He recounts this scene a month later, on August 15, as he is already under the control of the unseen monster "I am lost" Somebody possesses my soul and governs it! Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my thoughts!", "I wish to go out; I cannot. HE does not wish to"; "Then suddenly, I must, I MUST go to the foot of my garden to pick some strawberries and eat them – and I go there. I pick the strawberries and I eat them!" (73).

All these instances show the narrator asking for help, yet very distinctly from the first version, there is a sense of isolation here. The narrator only turns towards his diary to describe what he is truly feeling and experiencing. The only instance when he had asked for help in the beginning was from a doctor who had dismissed his symptoms for some sort of cold. The narrator has servants around him, and yet he does not confide in them, even more so, there is a sense of him isolating himself from them as well, as there are fewer mentions of them as the story progresses.

These scenes are a glimpse of the new discoveries in science – Charcot's ideas related to hypnotism mirrored in the edited version of the story, another layer of depth added to it, as it offers a way inside the mind of the character (Straub, 2015: 14-22). The subconscious is put on display, another fear exposed, of being unknowingly controlled by another, of losing agency, or even worse, of being aware that you are losing your agency. However, while the scene with the narrator's cousin could be seen as innocent, a show put on display with the idea of entertaining the guests at the table, the other scenes, when the monster is the one in control of the narrator are presented with a darker understanding of loss.

The other quite distinct scene of the second short story is the ending. As formerly mentioned, the first story ends more abruptly, as the narrator experiences the haunting, when it escalated, he has sought help and the reader finds him in a clinic. However, the second story never mentions a clinic. The narrator is more emotional, acting on his fear and despair. On September 10, he presents the Horla as not a constant presence, but one that comes-and-goes to feed on him and control him. As such, he seeks the opportunity to devise a plan in order to trap it inside his room, and then he mentions "I took the two lamps and poured all the oil on the carpet, the furniture, everywhere; then I set fire to it and made my escape, after having carefully double locked the door." (Maupassant 1996: 81). This would read as a triumph on his part, a triumph over the monster, and yet immediately we see the narrator guilty, as he had locked his servants inside as well. The servants, together with the monster, are burning inside the house – he had managed to not see them, the same way he did not see the monster. Nevertheless, this feeling is soon replaced by another, paranoia – "If He were not dead? […] No – no - there is no doubt about it - He is not dead. Then – then - I suppose I must kill MYSELF!" (82). This scene is fast paced, and although written in his journal, the narrator's description is vivid, which helps the reader discover every thought he has at the same time as him, as well as his decision to end himself in order to escape the monster.

To create the atmosphere of the two short stories, Guy de Maupassant relies on a mix of eerie and vivid descriptions, while at the same time, frustratingly so, leaving out the description of the monster itself. The Horla is never really illustrated as much than a presence, something that looms over him at times and drains his energy. In the first story, the monster gets its name from the narrator, yet in the second one the narrator mentions the monster tells him its name; not in an auditive manner, but he can perceive it in his mind and recognize it. The translated meaning of the monster had been difficult to pinpoint, as it is a mixture of two French words, which do not normally belong together. The French "hors" meaning "out of", and "**là**" meaning "there" – these words, combined, form an idea which is echoed in the story as well, of a monster from "out there", an outsider, illustrating the Gothic "other" in its bare form. (Miles, 2004: 317)

Another attempt at explaining the name has been by tying it into the Cholera epidemic that has stricken a few years prior to the short story being written – which could be argued for due to the description used in the story when tracking the origins of the monster "Madness, an epidemic of madness, which may be compared to that contagious madness which attacked the people of Europe in the Middle Ages". (Miles, 2004: 317). Calling this monster an epidemic would imply that it can either consume its victim's lives quickly, or that there are several of these unseen monsters roaming around. Later finding out that this monster travels, would reinforce the idea of an epidemic-type of monster, which has the purpose to conquer humanity.

In the victim's eyes the Horla is an ever-changing monster, no clear definition is being given to it – it's a ghost, then a vampire, then a being here to replace humankind as it has surpassed it. Regardless of the label the narrator tries to pin on it, the monster is dominating his thoughts. The Horla infiltrates the man's life quietly, turning him from a man sure of his sanity, capable of enjoying nature and the company of friends, to an isolated, depressed individual, who no longer can tell reality from supernatural. This is mostly evident in his journals from the very first entry "May 8. What a lovely day! I have spent all the morning lying on the grass in front of my house. I am fond of living here.I love the house in which I grew up.

What a delicious morning it was!" (Maupassant, 1996: 53) - to the last entry where we saw the narrator burning down his house and deciding to commit suicide.

Also found in the first entry is the first connection to the monster that will begin to torment him, "there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master; it was perfectly white and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly know why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure." (54). This moment foreshadows what the narrator later finds out, from reading about Professor Don Pedro Henriques's discoveries, about this "contagious madness" (76) that has taken place in the Province of San-Paulo – the illness that is, in actuality, the monster which torments him.

It is impossible to determine whether the character in Maupassant's story is indeed sane and haunted, or if the story is about progressing delusions. At times, the narrator wishes to prove to himself that he is sane, which provides the narration with a sense of verity. It asks the readers to believe alongside him, as he descends into his fears. In attempting to suppress his feeling of fear, he overuses rationality until it exhausts him – he can no longer perform any day-to-day tasks. Moreover, the refusal to seek the guidance of his servants is also of important notice. The narrator has servants around his house, and he is being tormented inside his house. However, none of the other characters comment on it, none of the other characters go through what he does - which brings to light the question if things are really, truly happening to the narrator, or if his inability to identify reality pervades the story. As soon as things escalate, one point mentioned in both versions of the story, although by different people, once a monk and the other a scholar, is that there are things which do indeed exist in this world, that we as humans cannot perceive. One example given by the monk is the wind: "Do we see the hundred thousandth part of what exists? Look here; there is the wind. Which is the strongest force in nature, the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars – have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however". (77)

Recalling the mention of the lack of description for the Horla, it becomes evident that it is done intentionally. Not only does it make it harder to define what exactly brings about terror, it also makes it hard to distinguish it from other fears. A creature that is not defined, that has the ability to access one's subconsciousness and control it, that feeds on the lifeforce of the humans it cohabitates with, the ultimate "other" as it cannot be truly labelled. The progression of the inappropriately named "hauntings" is derived of simple fear – the creature had not presented itself to the narrator, had not tried to make itself known. It incorrectly assumed it would be able to live its own life in company of this man, by drinking his water, enjoying his garden, reading alongside him. A certain boredom could be what had driven the monster to its boldness and increase in actions. And yet, due to the unknown nature of the monster, the narrator reacted as humanely as possible: with fear of the unknown. As ultimately, fear is what has driven the narrator into madness, what has driven him to arson, and what has driven him to suicide.

The possibilities remain open, that the author could have truly met the creature that would bring an end to humans, or that the author had a decline in mental health, ultimately giving in to paranoia.

III. Guy de Maupassant's mental illnesses – Hallucinations

An important aspect to understand when reading Guy de Maupassant is the interconnection between his life and his short stories – as the author's mental illness and history, put into a present-day-context, can help the reader see the monsters the writer created

as a result of his own experiences. Atia Sattar mentions that in Maupassant's stories "the supernatural is internalized: it becomes the mysteries of human mind" (Sattar, 2011: 230), tying into the idea that the illness he had gone through was the inspiration for the monsters he gave life to.

In *Maupassant and Medicine,* Straub comments upon the author's illness "Throughout his life, Maupassant suffered from migraines, and after contracting syphilis in his twenties, developed General Paralysis of the Insane, an advanced form of neurosyphilis, which caused severe neurological and psychiatric symptoms and slowly drove him insane." (2015: 3). There is also a reference (Pillet in Straub, 2015: 6) to a history of mental issues running in the author's family, both his mother, Laure, and his brother, Hervé, suffering from various neurological conditions. Unfortunately, medicine could not help any one of them. The first cure for syphilis, Penicillin, would not be discovered until 1928; as such, any treatment available during Maupassant's life was ineffective (Pearce, 2012: 277). Even more, neurological symptoms were interpreted by scientists as signs of syphilis until the 1900s (Straub, 2015: 7), which leaves us to believe that the suffering writer had no way of pinpointing exactly what was happening to him. Siân Miles, in her notes on Guy de Maupassant's life, details certain instances in which the author had vivid hallucinations, such as seeing a friend sitting on a chair, or, towards the end of his life, being convinced the flies would eat his brain (2004: ix - xxvi). The tragic degeneration of Maupassant's mental health was, ironically, a great source for his writings, as his characters were tormented beings, like him. However, unlike the author himself, his characters had a chance of naming their tormentor. Nearing the end of his life, the author had attempted suicide, which again, can be linked to the plot of his stories.

Guy de Maupassant's illness provides a window for readers to glimpse into the unpleasant aspects of the human existence, often-times pessimistic. In most of his works, his main characters struggle throughout their lives, only to end up let down in the end, realising that all their efforts had been futile. This negative view on life, alongside Maupassant's very own mental issues, had been reflected in *The Horla.* Even more so, given the advancements of knowledge a contemporary reader has on hand, it becomes easier to pinpoint what the hallucinations are caused by, and how they manifest.

Here are some psychological unsettling symptoms evoked by the story. Scopaesthesia is defined as an eerie feeling of being watched when you know you are alone. Another important term is "scotoma", described as "a spot in the visual field in which vision is absent of deficient", and this spot has the ability to come and go, eventually becoming a fixed spot in advanced cases (Titchener, 1898: 895-897). These affections do become more advanced in people suffering from migraines, as is it known that Maupassant did in his lifetime (Straub, 2015: 28). Another meaningful thing to take note of is that the author had used drugs attempting to self-treat, which is an explanation as to why he had been familiar to these hallucinations (Miles, 2004: ix - xxvi).

In the short story, the unnamed narrator is experiencing these "hauntings" – the first scene portrays the water from his jug disappearing during the night, as he sleeps. In a beautiful play on the sane-insane juxtaposition, the character, auto proclaimed as still sane, decides to conduct two experiments to see if he is the one drinking the water during his sleep and not remembering. This idea of bringing science into his life add a layer of credibility to the story. However, as both of his experiments fail, meaning that someone or something else is drinking the liquid, we see the first crack in the character's sanity. The Horla had infiltrated in his room,

while the protagonist is asleep. This state of sleep puts him in a very vulnerable position, as soon it is revealed that the Horla feeds from his lifeforce during it.

The next incident relays the narrator walking through his garden and seeing a rose floating in the air. As he runs towards the floating rose, the Horla throws it away, at the bottom of the bush, and runs away from the narrator. (Maupassant, 2004: 236-241) This signals the second crack in his lucidity. While the reader can see the narrator attempting to rationalize everything, he or she also has the knowledge of a supernatural being existing in this world, and thus can see the flaws in the protagonist's explanations and justifications.

Nonetheless, as the Horla continues to feed off the protagonist's life, it naturally becomes stronger and the narrator weaker. Due to this, the magnitude of the monster's hauntings increases. The narrator is soon able to feel it around him, to feel its presence, to sense its breath on his body. This, along with the previous two instances of interactions carried out between the Horla and the protagonist, show signs of being inspired by scopaesthesia.

A later scene in the story shows the narrator watching in horror as the pages of a book are moving one by one. In spite of this, the narrator surprises even himself as he proclaims that "With a furious bound, the bound of an enraged wild beast that wishes to disembowel its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him!" (75). As this is the first direct confrontation, his rage is palatable, while he attempts to regain a sense of normalcy by ridding himself of the monster. This ends with the monster "running" away from him, which encourages the protagonist to go forth and take action, as he realises that fear is something both of them feel.

The last interaction between the protagonist and the monster is the one which prove to the narrator that he had not gone insane, and that the creature is real, not just a figment of his imagination. As he journals "Horror! It was as bright as at midday, but I did not see myself in the glass! It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! But my figure was not reflected in it – and I, I was opposite to it!" (79). This points towards in the direction of the aforementioned symptom known as scotoma – something blurring a person's vision for a period of time.

These examples of hauntings stand as evidence that Guy de Maupassant had been familiar with mild hallucinations, and with their aggravation, as his illness progressed. Similar to an emotional rollercoaster that had been on a declining track.

IV. Conclusion

As the unnamed narrator of The Horla experiences terrifying hallucinations, often mirrored by the author's own life experiences, he is ultimately at a loss in attempting to explain what is happening to him. There is a constant presence of a fear of the unknown, fear of what will happen, which is what drives the narrator to his final escape - be it by institutionalising himself and asking for help from doctors, or by committing suicide and escaping the material dimension of existence. The short story taps into the unconscious mind, into primal fear, presenting it as a very powerful tool of driving one to insanity. The nemesis is individualized, personal, and strives only to consume its victim.

While Guy de Maupassant incorporated his mental illness and his knowledge of advancements made at that point in time in science, such as hypnotism, hysteria, symptoms of various types of madness, it is worth-while to re-examine his short stories with our own knowledge of contemporary science and advancements. Maupassant's descriptions of nineteenth-century France, through the lenses of a man that is struggling with his mental health, bring a unique literary insight into the attitude which society had towards the mentally

ill. The author's own decline is reflected in his characters' declines: the illness starts with hallucinations, followed by a loss of control over their own bodies, to severe forms of insanity, which no longer hurt only themselves but also the ones around them, such as arson in *The Horla*,

Fear of being driven to madness, fear of losing agency over your own body and mind, plays an important role in this short story. These types of fears serve as insight into the mind of someone who had access to discoveries from the medical field during his time, and who was trying to understand their own mind through their writing. In Maupassant's shortcomings of understanding the human mind, he found refuge in his works, and depicted any sign of madness as a monster, for at least in this way, it was something that he could name and that he could overcome.

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BOOK REVIEW

Annick Morard (2020). *Ourod, Autopsie culturelle des monstres en Russie*. Chêne-Bourg : La Baconnière, 302 p.

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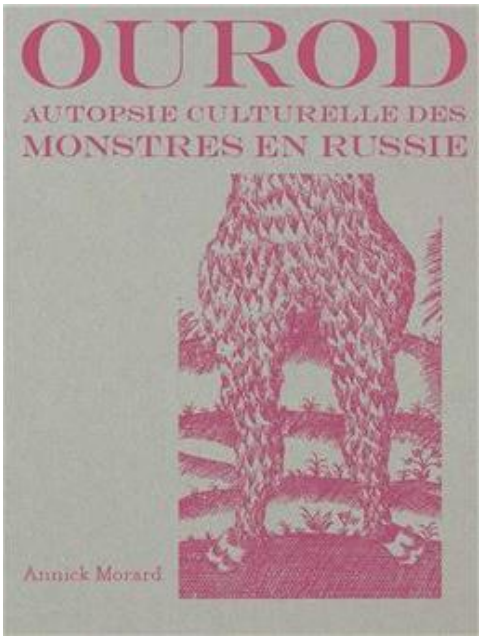

Dans *Ourod, Autopsie culturelle des monstres en Russie*, Annick Morard propose une étude fine et détaillée de la signification des figures monstrueuses au prisme des bouleversements sociaux et historiques du pays. Le préambule, intitulé « La culture russe, ce monstre », emploie la métaphore du monstre pour définir le caractère hybride de la culture russe, carrefour d'influences à cheval sur deux continents. La culture russe serait marquée par sa capacité d'absorption et de régurgitation des cultures étrangères : ainsi a-t-il pu exister, selon Vsevolod Bagno, un « donquichottisme russe, un nietzschéisme russe ». A partir de ce constat, Annick Morard expose clairement le but de son ouvrage : faire une histoire culturelle de la Russie, à partir des rapports à un Autre métaphorique, le monstre.

L'introduction passe évidemment par la définition du monstre, qui « s'offre comme un défi, un défi épistémologique, éthique et esthétique » (12). Pour Morard, le monstre est doté de trois significations principales. D'une part, en tant que créature intermédiaire, il incarne « les peurs et les tensions liées à l'expérience du changement » (12). D'autre part, le monstre se présente également comme un anti-modèle, un contre-exemple, une créature exclue ou marginale qui par-là même permet de questionner les normes, et les rapports entre l'individu et le collectif. Enfin, du fait de son originalité, de son caractère inclassable, le monstre peut se doter de connotations positives, notamment dans le cadre de la toute jeune Russie soviétique, qui entend faire table rase du passé. En définitive, le monstre est une créature plurielle, dont les connotations varient tout au long de l'histoire russe. Annick Morard distingue trois épisodes-clés de l'Histoire russe (un par siècle, depuis le XVIII^{ème} siècle), pour la figure du monstre : la fondation de la *Kunstkamera* au XVIII^{ème} siècle, les spectacles de monstres au XIX^{ème} siècle, et les expérimentations scientifiques du début du XX^{ème} siècle.

Son propos se subdivise ensuite en trois chapitres, qui suivent en grande partie la ligne chronologique évoquée ci-dessus. Le premier chapitre, consacré à « L'imaginaire du monstre en Russie », se veut plus large que les deux autres, et retrace la présence du monstre

en Russie, établissant un point de bascule au XIX^{ème} siècle, époque à laquelle se développe une fascination pour le corps monstrueux, en lien avec les avancées scientifiques et techniques du temps. Annick Morard défend alors une thèse ambitieuse, en rapprochant le monstre du « nouvel être humain » social-démocrate, dans la foulée du *Que faire ?* de Tchernychevsky, mais également du surhomme nietzschéen. Le lien entre ce « type d'homme nouveau », qui émerge au XIX^{ème} siècle, et le monstre, mériterait d'être ici explicité, même si l'auteure y revient dans le dernier chapitre. Ce chapitre développe de nombreuses idées mentionnées en introduction, notamment le fait que le monstre puisse incarner un moment de rupture, ou encore qu'il questionne la normalité. Le monstre est aussi l'envers monstrueux de nous-mêmes : « le monstre fait peur, parce qu'on se reconnaît en lui, mais jamais totalement, jamais entièrement » (51). Cette reconnaissance partielle de l'homme dans la figure monstrueuse explique les réactions contrastées que le monstre suscite, allant de la peur à la pitié, en passant par le désir. Cette dimension érotique du monstre, moins intuitive que les autres, aurait mérité un développement plus poussé.

Dans le deuxième chapitre « Montrer les monstres », Annick Morard, jouant sur l'étymologie du mot, se penche sur les cabinets de curiosité du XVIII^{ème} siècle, et la diffusion des « freak shows », ou spectacles de monstres, au XIX^{ème} siècle. Femmes à barbe, hommes-tronc s'exhibent notamment au cirque, où des spectateurs fascinés se pressent pour contempler l'anormalité. Avant cela, l'établissement de la *Kunstkamera*, premier musée de Russie (aujourd'hui Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie à Saint-Pétersbourg), par Pierre-le-Grand, avait mené à une revalorisation relative des choses monstrueuses, exposées pour leur rareté dans ce musée à mi-chemin entre le cabinet de curiosité et le Palais des découvertes. Le fait que l'ouvrage d'Annick Morard fournisse des images des créatures de spectacles de monstres n'est pas la moindre de ses qualités.

Le troisième chapitre, intitulé « Les Monstres, entre l'ancien et le nouveau », se penche plus particulièrement sur la dimension politique du monstre, en lien à la fois avec les changements révolutionnaires et la « révolution scientifique » (Nikolaï Krementsov) du début du XX^{ème} siècle. Le bouillonnement scientifique du premier quart du XX^{ème} siècle mène ainsi à une série d'expérimentations, qui, en lien avec l'essor de la science-fiction, visent à produire des corps hybrides, c'est-à-dire monstrueux. Ainsi, les travaux d'Ilia Ivanov sur l'insémination artificielle, visant à hybrider l'homme et le singe, posent la question de la frontière entre les espèces. Loin de ce à quoi l'on pourrait s'attendre, le retour à l'animal n'est pas perçu, par le tout jeune pouvoir soviétique, comme une régression, mais plutôt comme une source possible de régénération : derrière l'hybridation animale se cache l'idée que l'homme pourrait faire table rase de ses déterminismes bourgeois. Ce lien entre l'hybride et l'homme nouveau fait par ailleurs l'objet de plusieurs romans de science-fiction très populaires à l'époque (comme ceux d'Alexandre Beliaev), auxquels Annick Morard consacre des pages d'une grande finesse d'analyse. La célèbre nouvelle *Cœur de Chien*, de Boulgakov, témoigne ainsi parfaitement du rapport qui est établi entre « l'homme nouveau » que le régime appelle de ses vœux, et la volonté de forger physiquement cet homme, pourquoi pas en le mêlant à l'animal. Puis l'auteure montre comment, avec le durcissement du régime mis en place par Staline, le corps hybride cesse d'être positif, pour ne plus signifier que la monstruosité des ennemis du peuple (comme en témoigne par exemple le traitement de la figure du capitaliste chez Marietta Chaguinian).

L'épilogue, « Avec ou sans les monstres », propose un élargissement bienvenu à la période contemporaine. La prolifération de monstres dans la littérature post-soviétique suscite bien des interrogations. Tandis que certains y voient le triomphe d'une esthétique propre à exprimer la « moralité gothique » de la société russe contemporaine (Dina Khapaeva), d'autres comme Alexander Etkind ou Mark Lipovetsky y voient plutôt l'expression métaphorique d'un traumatisme historique dont la Russie n'aurait pas fait le deuil. Revenant sur les développements effectués en troisième partie, Annick Morard affirme quant à elle qu'il ne faut pas s'inquiéter de la prolifération des monstres, mais bien plutôt de leur disparition, comme l'a prouvé l'éradication des monstres dans les années 30 en Russie, signe d'un durcissement du régime. Transformer les monstres en simples repoussoirs va à l'encontre de leur nature même, qui échappe à la catégorisation. Pour l'auteure, la prolifération de monstres divers indique au contraire une forme de résistance à la pensée unique.

Annick Morard produit là un ouvrage fascinant et fouillé, érudit et d'une grande clarté. Nous ne saurions que recommander sa lecture, aussi agréable qu'instructive.

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BOOK REVIEW

Irina Bădescu (2021). *Fragil, cuvântul întrupat: studii de istorie intelectuală şi istorie culturală*. Volum îngrijit de Vlad Alexandrescu. Text stabilit de Vlad Alexandrescu şi Adina Ruiu, studiu introductiv şi bibliografie de Vlad Alexandrescu. Bucureşti: Editura Spandugino, 1128 p.

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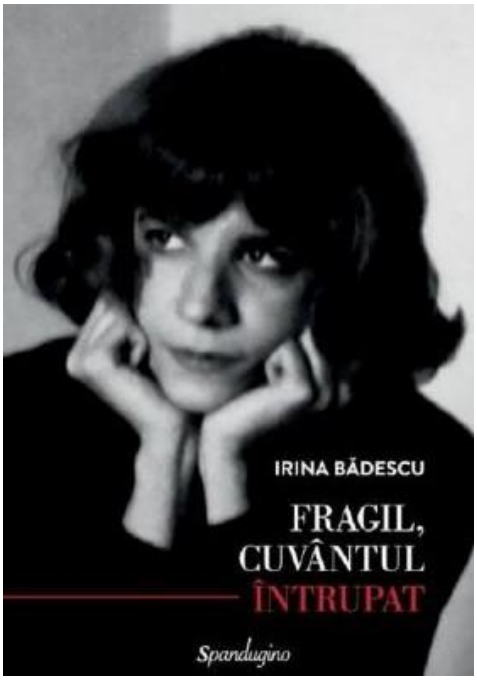

Marginalii la *Fragil, cuvântul întrupat* de Irina Bădescu

Volumul de faţă, pregătit *in memoriam* profesoarei şi cercetătoarei emerite Irina Bădescu de către discipolul, cel puţin în ceea priveşte studiul secolului Luminilor, Vlad Alexandrescu, reuneşte opera ştiinţifică a acesteia (articole şi eseuri publicate, dar şi studii finalizate, însă inedite). Editorul mărturiseşte, în notele care precedă textele, că în organizarea acestei impresionante arhive de exegeze şi studii care vizează domenii înrudite ale cercetării literare (semiotică, teorie şi critică literară, hermeneutică literară şi diferite poetici de inspiraţie lingvistică sau fenomenologică), a ţinut cont de organizarea tematică şi cronologică gândită de autoare în cele două proiecte de sumar redactate în anul 1998, respectiv 2004, şi de dorinţa acesteia de a nu distinge între textele publicate în limba română şi cele publicate în limba franceză.

În ciuda caracterului său compozit, corpusul de faţă se prezintă ca un text *rotund*, organizat în jurul a două idei centrale: cititorul şi cuvintele. Din notele sumarului redactat de Irina Bădescu – „Nu am avut de gând [...] când m-am hotărât să public aceste studii, să fac un soi de *opera omnia* [...] Ar fi fost prezumţios: ce pot spune astăzi, şi mai ales cui, nişte texte scrise la răstimpuri?" (p. 65) – observăm preocuparea autoarei cu privire la receptorul textelor sale şi la statutul lecturii în spaţiul universitar autohton, dar şi în societatea românească în general, fapt care este regăsit nu numai în numeroasele interogaţii risipite în studiile din acest volum, cum ar fi: „Que lisent les Roumains? Comment lisent les Roumains? [...] Pas beaucoup, quantitativement." (p. 1014), ci şi în meditaţiile cu privire la dificultăţile traducerii lui Mihai Eminescu în limba franceză sau ale lui Charles Baudelaire în limba română. Îngrijorarea cu privire la pierderea cititorului de cursă lungă: „Întrebarea, astăzi, este însă: cine mai citeşte? Şi mai ales, de la prima la ultima pagină?" (p. 1064), formulată în finalul articolului dedicat Ninei Façon,

subliniază, aşa cum o indică şi titlul volumului, faptul că pentru Irina Bădescu, cuvântul nu este o literă inertă, ci „este act, prezenţă la sine – întrupare" (p. 514) existând deplin prin/în dialog.

Într-unul dintre studiile care deschid acest volum „Le froumain dans (tous) ses états" (1998), Irina Bădescu realizează o cronică istorico-culturală complexă referitoare la raporturile şi contactele culturii române moderne cu limba şi civilizaţia franceză. Un asemenea demers critic în care sunt scrutate relaţiile culturii române cu limba franceză şi în care sunt demontate o serie de mituri create în jurul francofiliei autohtonilor – pentru societatea românească în curs de modernizare şi sincronizare cu Occidentul – limba franceză pare să fi constituit vehicul de transmitere mai degrabă a unui „savoire-vivre", decât a unui „savoire-faire", jucând rolul unui intermediar cultural: „Modiste française, oui, mais pas de couturière, ni petite, ni grande maison et presque pas de maisons de couture tenues par les Français. Le modiste ne se sert que de ses gestes, gracieux, magiques, tandis que la couture s'ecombre d'un équipement tout ou presque de fabrication allemande." (p. 118). Considerăm că demersul în cauză reprezintă o nepreţuită moştenire pentru studiile de românistică şi pentru posibilele cercetări de antropologie literară şi imagologie: (hetero-imagini ale francezului în dramaturgia lui Vasile Alecsandri, Ion Luca Caragiale sau în proza lui Mihail Sadoveanu).

În secţiunea dedicată „Teoriei şi exegezei literare" regăsim o serie de studii ştiinţifice consacrate unor subiecte la frontiera dintre teoria literaturii şi poetică (statutul personajului literar, literaritatea ca proces, mitul ca instrument de cunoaştere), pe care autoarea le cercetează folosindu-se de instrumentarul de concepte şi metode de analiză propuse de poeticienii stucturalişti. Parcursul profesional al Irinei Bădescu vădeşte o constantă preocupare pentru aplicarea în analiză a celor mai noi direcţii de abordare ale literaturii, precum şi o perpetuuă încercare de sincronizare a studiilor culturale româneşti cu mişcările culturale din afara acestuia, culminând cu iniţiativa introducerii la Universitatea Bucureşti a unui program masteral destinat studiului literaturii din Québec.

Capitolul despre „Luminile franceze" cuprinde două secţiuni ample: o parte dedicată studiilor teoretice şi alta consacrată prelegerilor despre literatura secolului al XVIII-lea francez. Sub titlul „Proza Luminilor franceze" (1986) autoarea inventariază condiţiile romanului ca gen proscris, a cărui supravieţuire a depins de doi factori: conţinuturile abordate (romanul ca vehicul al criticii instituţiilor şi societăţii, prin apariţia unor figuri topice din romanul picaresc, reactualizate şi resemnificate – hanul ca răscruce de povestiri, drumul ca metaforă a vieţii, şi care generează tipologii noi de personaje – canibalul lui Montaigne, naivul lui Voltaire, persanii lui Montesquieu care, sub masca *străinului* şi sub pretextul înstrăinării, fac posibilă satira) şi de publicul vizat: „naşterea laborioasă a romanului în sens modern are drept consecinţă formarea şi educarea unui public cititor de romane, crearea unui adevărat mod de-a gândi şi simţi" (p. 404).

Exegezele reunite în secţiunea de prelegeri care au fost susţinute de Irina Bădescu în faţa studenţilor de la secţiile de limbă franceză prezintă un pronunţat caracter interdisciplinar: proza secolului al XVIII-lea francez este investigată cu mijloacele oferite de hermeneutica literară şi de teroriile receptării. Abordând numeroase metode de analiză şi interpretare a textelor, Irina Bădescu recuperează proza secolului al XVIII-lea francez şi îi descoperă o modernitate *avant-la-lettre*, oferim, ca exemplu, reinterpretarea romanului *Jacques Le Fataliste* („*Jacques fatalistul şi stăpânul său*: La hanul cu ficţiuni", 1978) ca text care, prin intermediul tehnicii demontării jucăriilor sub ochii cititorului, devine un

„roman de-făcut asemenea *Jurnalului falsificatorilor de bani* al lui André Gide" (p. 680).

În secţiunea numită „Lecturi şi interpretări" sunt grupate articolele publicate de Irina Bădescu în urma unor conferinţe şi simpozioane ştiinţifice în cadrul cărora aceasta a propus spre dezbatere, cu acelaşi apetit pentru interdisciplinaritate şi analiză teoretică aprofundată, operele unor autori diverşi: de la tragicii clasicismului francez, Corneille şi Racine, până la Barbey d'Aurevilly.

„Cum poate cineva să fie canadian francofon?" (p. 977) (interogaţie care calchiază celebra „Comment peut-on être Persan?" a lui Montesquieu) deschide textul prin intermediul căruia Irina Bădescu pregăteşte, apelând la numeroase argumente privitoare la importanţa unui asemenea program, lansarea cursurilor de masterat dedicate studiului literaturii din Québec. În cele două articole de căpătâi referitaore la domeniul inaugurat, „Despre conştiinţa culturală minoritară: cazul Québec" (1991) şi „Enseigner le Québec en Roumanie – Notes sur une expérience" (2001), autoarea dezbate cele trei ipoteze ale naşterii acestei conştiinţei culturale şi literare a Québecului, raporturile dintre cultura canadiană anglofonă majoritară şi cultura francofonă canadiană minoritară şi investighează care sunt principalele teme ale acestui discurs: revizitarea constantă a mitului canadianului rătăcitor, singurătatea exprimată prin metafora zăpezii, a spaţiilor pustii şi aşteptarea. Profesorul – care dublează scriitorul şi criticul – atrage atenţia asupra obiectului de studiu al noului program: „Nu se potriveşte să vorbim despre o literatură canadiană de expresie franceză, ci de mai multe literaturi francofone" (p. 985), dar şi asupra faptului că „franceza literaturii canadiene nu e franceza [continentală], ci o altă limbă refăcută prin împrumuturi, calcuri, distorsiuni semantico-gramaticale şi de pronunţie, de origine anglofonă, laolată cu arhaismele şi regionalismele franceze" (p. 984). În studiul din 2001, Irina Bădescu motivează necesitatea introducerii acestui program de studii în România: „învăţarea limbilor străine nu vizează numai deprinderea acestora (pe termen scurt), ci schimbarea modului de gândire a identităţii şi a alterităţii." (p. 989).

Ciclul „Addenda" reuneşte o serie de articole importante, în care sunt dezbătute teme diverse: statutul lecturii în cultura română, problemele sistemului de învăţământ românesc sau dificultăţile de traducere a poeziei lui Mihai Eminescu şi Lucian Blaga în limba franceză şi ale lui Charles Baudelaire în limba română (din cauza „incompatibilităţilor de fond între versificaţia tonică a francezei şi cea silabică românească", p. 1033). Remarcabilă ni s-a părut cronica despre „străin" în spaţiul românesc – „şi azi [1995] cartea rămâne Străinul, intrusul" (p. 1020) – în care Irina Bădescu realizează un excurs în istoria lecturii şi a statutului cărţii în cultura română, în care aminteşte despre numeroşii „intermediari culturali": slavona bisericească, greaca, turca şi rusa, care produc „demi-lectures" (p. 1015), despre traducerile neîntrerupte şi fragmentare din limbi „ale străinilor", care creează şi întreţin sentimentul că limbajul scrierii este diferit de cel vorbit – „une langue étrangère, en somme" (p. 1018) şi despre lipsa unui canon în ceea ce priveşte producerea şi înţelegerea literaturii, a unui „classicisme au sense occidental du terme" (p. 1018).

În încheiere, considerăm binevenită gruparea într-un singur volum a tuturor lucrărilor concepute de Irina Bădescu de-a lungul anilor de profesorat şi de cercetare pentru că facilitează consultarea lor de către cititori specializaţi şi nu numai, şi pentru că se dovedeşte un valoros omagiu pentru efortul intelectal depus, decenii la rând, în slujirea cuvintelor.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ileana Oana Macari & Iulia Andreea Milică (Eds.) (2021). *Romanian Culture – A Crash Course*. Iaşi: Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi, 205 p.

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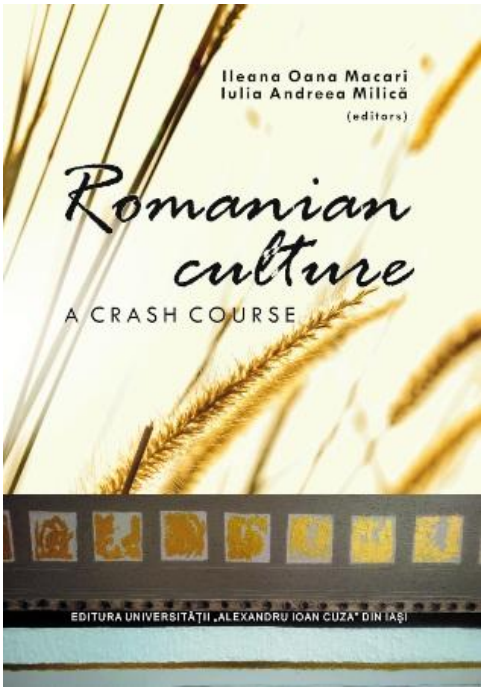

Volumul editat de Ileana Oana Macari şi Iulia Andreea Milică reuneşte semnăturile a treisprezece specialişti din cinci facultăţi ale Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi, cu scopul de a le oferi străinilor repere esenţiale ale culturii române, într-o abordare accesibilă, dar profundă.. Publicul căruia i se adresează editorii este format în principal din studenţii Erasmus, lectorii străini, *visiting professors*; aceştia vor avea posibilitatea de a dobîndi o înţelegere care le va îmbunătăţi percepţia în momentul interacţiunii fizice cu societatea românească.

Conceput într-o manieră asemănătoare clasicelor manuale de etnografie, volumul se prezintă ca un panopticum de subiecte, oferind o complexă şi cuprinzătoare reprezentare a societăţii româneşti. Ţinînd cont de dificultatea cu care străinii localizează cultura română, studiile sînt interpretări de prim ordin, ale nativilor, purtînd cititorul direct în miezul a ceea ce face obiectul interpretării, punîndu-l în contact cu semnificaţia evenimentelor menţionate, oferindu-i contexte, deducînd semnificaţii locale şi desprinzînd concluzii, interpretînd realitatea şi eliminînd exoticul şi straniul de suprafaţă, banalizînd uneori, dar şi reducînd gradul de opacitate al culturii. În fond, important este să se ofere străinului o cale de acces la gîndirea locală, la sensurile locale, şi nu o aglomerare de evenimente uşor observabile, aparent interesante, dar ininteligibile.

În *Romania and the Romanians*, Roxana-Gabriela Curcă apelează la modelul clasic al *breviarum*-ului, pentru a surprinde o lungă şi complicată istorie prin selectarea celor mai importante şi relevante aspecte privind originea, cristalizarea identităţii şi formarea naţiunii. Articolul prezintă sintetic romanizarea populaţiilor native, migraţiile, crearea structurilor politice independente, rezistenţa în faţa atacurilor populaţiilor migratoare, apariţia de instituţii culturale, cuceririle maghiarilor şi otomanilor, influenţa Iluminismului, nirea principatelor, alianţa cu Germania nazistă, dominaţia sovietică, revoluţia populară din 1989 şi instalarea perioadei de tranziţie.

Articolul *The Romanian language*, de Alexandru Gafton, explică succint procesul şi

factorii de romanizare, insistînd asupra coerenţei relaţiei dintre romani şi cei cuceriţi prin aplicarea unitară, dar suplă şi adecvată particularităţilor locale, a regulilor culturale. Elementul crucial al romanizării a fost factorul militar, adică intrarea în armată a locuitorilor din teritoriile cucerite. Acţiunile prin care imperiul se menţinea prosper au avut şi un proces secundar, romanizarea, cu un efect al său: romanitatea. Limbile romanice sînt rezultatul unui proces prin care latina vernaculară a evoluat, adaptîndu-se şi supravieţuind în condiţii particulare. Diferenţa dintre limbile rezultate nu elimină sau atenuează originea comună, ceea ce dă identitate limbilor romanice este secvenţa moştenită: toate sînt romanice în aceeaşi grad. Limba română are o unitate sistemică şi una de normă lingvistică, dar din cauza condiţiilor extralingvistice a dezvoltat o diferenţiere literară pe baze regionale; diferenţele sînt minore şi inconsistente, dar fragmentarea politico-administrativă a condus la promovarea unor posibilităţi diferite, cu norme lingvistice locale şi regionale. Chiar şi după unificare, factorul politico-administrativ va fi din nou puternic, astfel încît baza normei literare actuale este subdialectul muntean. În perioada 1960-1990, limba română a trecut printr-o perioadă de supremă stabilitate şi unitate, dar după revoluţie, schimbări de paradigmă socială şi mentală au condus la o degradare a ei, respectiv la scăderea numărului de indivizi cunoscători şi utilizatori ai normei literare.

În studiul *Writing and pronunciation*, Roxana Vieru analizează succint stagiile evolutive ale limbii române scrise: de la substratul dacic la influenţa limbii latine, greceşti şi slavone – cu alfabetele corespunzătoare – în textele religioase şi administrative şi întoarcerea la alfabetul latin. Evoluţia culturii scrise a fost strîns legată de contextele politico-religioase: alfabetul chirilic a fost dominant în Moldova şi Ţara Românească, cel latin în Transilvania. Alfabetul latin a fost adoptat oficial la mijlocul sec. al XIX-lea, dar lipsa din alfabet a unor litere care să corespundă tuturor sunetelor limbii a dus la numeroase adaptări, cea mai recentă fiind în 1993. În final, autoarea oferă şi un deosebit de util şi comprehensibil ghid de scriere şi pronunţare a sunetelor limbii române.

În *Geography, transport and tourism*, Mihai Bulai prezintă informaţii despre caracteristicile geografice ale teritoriului românesc, diversitatea peisajelor şi varietatea resurselor naturale, rezervaţii şi monumente naturale, climă, transporturi şi turism, realizînd o pitorească, dar adevărată imagine a României, extrem de atractivă mai ales pentru cei ce vor să evadeze din vacarmul metropolelor europene.

O foarte clară descriere a sistemului administrativ românesc este realizată de Ada Iuliana Popescu în *Public administration and local authorities*. Articolul este o istorie a organizării administrative din sec. al XVIII-lea pînă în sec. al XX-lea, subliniind pertinent transformările survenite în urma schimbărilor de regim politic. De asemenea, sînt prezentate împărţirea administrativă a teritoriului, subliniindu-se principiile fundamentale: descentralizare, autoguvernare şi deconcentrarea serviciilor publice.

În *Politics and governement*, Diana Mărgărit înfăţişează naşterea statului modern ca pe un proces lung şi sîngeros; în aprox. 150 de ani au avut loc unirea a două provincii (1859), lovitura de palat şi stabilirea monarhiei constituţionale (1866), războiul de independenţă (1877), transformarea în regat (1881), dictatura regală (1938-1940), dictatura militară fascistă (1940-1944), restabilirea monarhiei constituţionale (1944), transformarea în republică comunistă (1947), introducerea democraţiei şi a regimului pluralist prin revoluţie (1989). Articolul prezintă organizarea politică a României, partidele politice şi cultura politică locală subliniind momentele critice ale tranziţiei, dar şi emergenţa angajamentului civic.

Studiul *Education*, de Ioan Milică, surprinde în diacronie diferitele stadii ale dezvoltării sistemului educaţional. Începînd din Evul Mediu, procesul educativ a fost realizat întotdeauna în relaţie cu instituţiile religioase. O modificare importantă de paradigmă apare tîrziu, în sec. al XVII-lea: familiile bogate încep să-şi trimită copiii să studieze în străinătate, schimburile culturale se intensifică şi apar primele instituţii moderne de educaţie înaltă: Academia Vasiliană la Iaşi şi Academia Domnească din Bucureşti, care păstrează legăturile tradiţionale cu centrele monastice (se învaţă în limbile de cultură ale epocii: greacă, slavonă, latină). În prima jumătate a sec. XIX-lea începe crearea reţelei de instituţii educaţionale moderne dar şi îndreptarea decisivă spre vest: elita alege să studieze în capitalele europene. După unirea din 1859 apare şi prima lege modernă a educaţiei (Legea 1150/25.11.1864) care prevede şi înfiinţare de biblioteci publice şi sînt create Universităţile moderne la Iaşi şi Bucureşti, urmate de fondarea Academiei Române. Pînă în preajma celui de-al doilea război, nivelul educaţiei în România se ridica la standarde europene, dar odată cu trecerea la comunism, legăturile cu vestul au fost tăiate sau cenzurate radical, iar educaţia s-a îndreptat către mase. Elevii şi studenţii au fost înrolaţi în diferite organizaţii politice, urmînd a deveni cetăţeni model, specialişti în domeniile de dezvoltare, în special industrie şi agricultură. Căderea regimului comunist a schimbat viziunea asupra educaţiei şi mai multe legi ale educaţiei au fost emise de parlament, au apărut numeroase instituţii private de învăţămînt şi România s-a aliniat din nou la standardele internaţionale.

În *The media*, Lucian Bălănuţă prezintă evoluţia mass-media de-a lungul istoriei moderne a României, cu accent pe cea post-revoluţionară. Autorul analizează succint apariţia ziarelor, posturilor de radio şi televiziunilor private, precum şi schimbarea legislaţiei şi apariţia unor instituţii pentru menţinerea independenţei şi transparenţei informaţiilor, creşterea şi descreşterea puterii media, rolul oamenilor de afaceri proprietari de media (aşa numiţii moguli!), declinul sub presiunea economicului precum şi apariţia concurenţei sub forma de social media.

Studiul *Mentalities and religion* este construit de Adrian Crupa în jurul existenţei unui „mod de gîndire" românesc: identitatea locală pare modelată de dorinţa de supravieţuire şi valorizează rezilienţa, aşa cum o arată – autorul îşi asumă distanţarea faţă de etnografia microscopică – un popular proverb: *Apa trece, pietrele rămîn*. Această rezistenţă, consideră autorul, se bazează pe mentalitatea ţărănească şi pe religia ortodoxă, implicînd o legătură strînsă a locuitorilor cu pămîntul şi păstrarea credinţei în ciuda efemerelor puteri conducătoare, efectul secundar fiind o tradiţională lipsă de încredere în instituţiile statului. Comunismul a încercat să distrugă cultura tradiţională ţărănească prin intermediul colectivizării, naţionalizării şi sistematizării satelor. După revoluţia anticomunistă din 1989, noile valori se impun cu dificultate: conştiinţa individuală, gîndirea critică şi responsabilitatea civică. Totuşi, în prezent există o considerabilă credinţă în protecţia divinităţii şi o suspiciune faţă de argumentele ştiinţifice. Paradoxal, aparent, dar e resurgenţa tradiţionalei neîncrederi în mesajul autorităţii, fie el şi ştiinţific.

Utilizînd o serie de unsprezece proverbe circumscrise importanţei familiei în cultura tradiţională, studiul *Kinship and family*, de Ana-Maria Ştefan, demonstrează locul fundamental ocupat de relaţiile de rudenie în mentalitatea românească, nealterate de schimbările de regim politic. Deşi generaţia tînără doreşte independenţa financiară, multe familii tinere se bazează pe ajutorul părinţilor; nefiind deloc rare cazurile în care trei generaţii locuiesc într-un singur apartament, cel al bunicilor, dobîndit în perioada comunistă. Dar, solidaritatea a trei generaţii şi angajamentul reciproc aduc şi proximitatea cu

familia soţiei/soţului, şi de aici derivă fricţiuni – tot tradiţionale.. Mentalitatea românească evocă un trecut patriliniar şi patriarhal: în familile ţărăneşti/tradiţionale rolul genurilor şi diviziunea muncii sînt încă strict reglementate, iar familia extinsă devine vizibilă cu ocazia marilor ceremonii.

Ileana Oana Macari, în *Conversation and behavior codes*, porneşte de la o observaţie pertinentă: românilor le place să îşi amintească şi să li se amintească că sînt urmaşii Romei sau, şi mai bine, că sînt o insulă de latinitate într-un ocean de slavi. Adevărul istoric contează prea puţin atunci cînd blazonul mitic funcţionează ca indicator al raporturilor de forţă şi cînd genealogiile legendare servesc ca modalitate de afirmare identitară, dar şi ca formule de deferenţă şi flatare, obligatorii în deschiderea dialogului diplomatic (Paul Veyne). Recursul la originea romană oferă românilor prestigiu şi, dată fiind legătura strînsă dintre identitate şi limbă, conversaţia şi codul comportamental sînt temperamental latine: românii sînt calzi, pasionaţi, familişti şi cu prejudecăţi. Cititorii străini sînt informaţi că există subiecte de conversaţie problematice, sînt avizaţi asupra structurii de baza a conversaţiei cu un nativ, asupra formulelor interacţiune socială şi primesc informaţii utile asupra codurilor comportamentale, subliniindu-se neîncrederea în străini şi autorităţi şi puterea religiozităţii.

Arts and leisure time, de Mădălina Elena Mandici, înfăţişează varietatea activităţilor culturale şi de agrement întîlnite astăzi în România; se face referire la arta modernă, la literatură, la film şi cinematografie, muzică şi dans, sport şi divertisment, oferind cititorului străin exact răspunsul la întrebarea „Ce e de făcut în România în timpul liber?".

Ultimul studiu, *Foods and drinks*, de Iulia Andreea Milică, este o încununare a întregului volum despre cultura română. Şi asta pentru că, de la Brillat Savarin şi Claude-Lévi Strauss, gastronomia şi bucătăria nu mai sînt chestiuni banale, de vulgară nutriţie sau de savori exotice. Gastronomia arta a plăcerii conviviale, iar bucătăria un limbaj în care societatea îşi traduce inconştient structura; astfel, elementele ei pot exprima operaţiunile fundamentale ale gîndirii, iar analiza ei permite decelarea principiilor ordonatoare ale societăţii. Aşadar, nu numai ce mănîncă românii, ci şi de ce şi cum mănîncă. Autoarea urmăreşte avatarurile bucătăriei româneşti şi a specificului naţional, iar concluzia e similară cu aceea din alte domenii culturale: istoria României a fost mereu modelată de contexte, de influenţe, prin urmare, bucătăria specifică e o fuziune tradiţională (cu mult înainte de definirea conceptului de *fusion cuisine*). Bucătăria turcă, grecească, austro-ungară, germană, poloneză, ucraineană şi rusească s-au întîlnit şi românizat prin combinarea şi modificarea cantităţilor ingredientelor, înlocuirea cu unele indigene şi interpretarea locală a mirodeniilor şi a timpului de gătit. Studiul prezintă gusturile şi savorile româneşti şi devine extrem de util pentru musafirii străini pentru că – fără a inventaria meniuri bizare – le oferă explicaţii şi traduceri pentru cele mai populare feluri de mîncare susceptibile de a fi întîlnite.

În concluzie, volumul reuşeşte să pună la un loc aspecte pe care orice nativ le cunoaşte într-o mai mică sau mai mare măsură – sau, mai precis, cele pe care unii români cred că toţi românii ar trebui să le ştie despre ei înşişi – într-o prezentare coerentă care îndeplineşte promisiunea titlului.

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